Sport Fan Tourism:
Understanding Those Who
Travel To Follow Sport Teams

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Batchelor of Business (with Honours)

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This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

_________________
Sheranne Fairley
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**Megan Cleaver Sellick**

Taken from this earth 2 July 2004, aged 29.
A beautiful friend, colleague, and mentor

An hour before submitting this dissertation I learned that my beautiful friend, colleague, and mentor, who offered continual support during this process would be leaving us. With a heavy heart, I submitted this dissertation and would like to dedicate it to the memory of Megan Cleaver Sellick whose memory will live on in the minds of the many that she loved and touched. I am truly blessed to be one of them.

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Abstract

Sport events and attractions which encourage both participants and spectators are seen as significant contributors to the tourism economy (Delpy, 1998; Glyptis, 1991; Standeven & DeKnop, 1999). Further, Gratton and Taylor (2000) note that sport related travel accounts for 7% of total expenditure on sport. To date, the main focus of event sport tourism research has been on the economic impact of large-scale sport events (Burgan & Mules, 1992; Crompton, 1995; Mules & Faulkner, 1996; Walo, Bull, & Breen, 1996). However, Higham (1999) posits that smaller scale events such as regular season games may be of greater benefit to the host community as these events are hosted within existing infrastructure and therefore limit the need for public expenditure.

However, fans who travel to regular season competition are a market segment that has been largely ignored by both sport and tourism marketers. Sport marketers have focused on home game attendance, media viewership and product purchases, while tourism marketers have focused on leveraging the destination. Anecdotal evidence suggests that fans who travel organise a substantial proportion of their discretionary time and income around this activity. Recent research by Gibson, Willming and Holdnak (2002, 2003) has begun to understand the behaviours of sport fans who travel to home games. This study seeks to understand the behaviours and experiences of those who travel to attend away games. In particular the study asks: What motivates fans to travel to follow professional sport teams, what experiences fans have and seek during the travel, and what place does travelling to follow a sport team have in the overall consumption behaviour of sport fans.

This study examined the motives and experiences of six fan groups travelling interstate to follow their Australian Football League (AFL) team in the 2001 season. As the behaviours and experiences of those who travel to follow sport teams have not previously been explored, exploratory analysis using an iterative process of constant comparison between data collected from the research setting and the existent literature. Using this method the researcher was able to describe the social world under investigation without preconceived hypotheses. The researcher travelled interstate with each fan group, and collected data via participant observation and interviews with key informants. Data were coded using standard protocols for analysis of qualitative data (Spradley, 1980). The researcher read through the transcripts and field notes and coded all phrases and opinions from the manuscript. Data were analysed through the process of data reduction, selective sampling of the literature, and selected sampling of the data (Stern, 1980). From the initial codes, data reduction identified core variables and emergent themes. Through this grounded theory methodology, a conceptual model was developed which illustrates the motives and experiences of those who travel to follow professional sport teams.

Three distinct types of groups were identified, each garnering a distinctive sport tourism experience. The groups identified were: supporter groups, long-term travel groups, and temporary travel groups. While travel to follow the team is the stated rationale for all
three groups, the game experience for each is substantially different, four major themes emerged which distinguished the groups and the experiences that they had. These were: (1) group structure, (2) trip characteristics, (3) socialisation, and (4) game experience and reaction to game outcome. Each type of group was found to have a distinct group structure, communication pattern, but differed in terms of the objects to which they identified. Findings suggest that sport fans do not necessarily identify with the team or related object, but can identify with a smaller social group, which has a shared interest in the team. These elements of group structure and point of identification were found to have a reciprocal relationship with various travel elements that were utilised by each group including the mode of transport, temporal elements, choice of destination, and activities at the destination. In particular, the travel elements were chosen so that each group type could best express and experience that which is core to each group. Further analysis suggested that the experience of each of the groups was influenced by the continual development of the group both before and during the travel experience. For the supporter groups and long-term travel groups, rituals, symbols, and folklore played a key role in the experience. These elements of performance were used to continually shape and interpret the travel experience.

One would expect that the game would have elevated importance, as it is the activity that legitimates each group. However, the on-field game did not have prime importance. Instead the different points of identification of each group were used as a basis through which the game was experienced. Key implications for sport and tourism marketing suggest that the sport tourism experience is more than an experience of place or an experience of watching the sport. Identification with a small social group is sufficient to generate travel to follow a team. By providing a setting which immerses participants in a particular identity for a prolonged period of time, the act of travelling itself can create a social climate that encourages participants to undertake the trip week after week, and form deep connection to the team. Implications for practice and future research directions are also discussed.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Sport is an activity that permeates many aspects of modern life in most industrialized countries. Activities such as participating in sport, and following sport have become integral parts of everyday life. In 2001, over three quarters of the Australian population (77.7%) participated in sport. Australia’s fascination with sport lies not only in participation but extends further to the following of sport (www.dfat.gov.au/aib/sport.html). During the year ending April 1999, 47.1% of Australians aged 15 years and over attended sporting matches or competitions (excluding junior and school sports) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999). Fifty-five percent of the Australian population watched sport on television during 2001, rating behind only news and current affairs as the most frequently watched television programs (www.dfat.gov.au/aib/sport.html). Following sport for many extends beyond game attendance and television viewing, to other forms of consumption such as purchasing licensed products (e.g., clothing, banners, memorabilia), and other consumption of media (e.g., radio, internet, print media). The consumption of symbols and objects is often used to parade and celebrate an allegiance to a particular team, player, or related aspect (Kahle, Kambara, & Rose, 1996; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001).

It is clear given the sheer number of people who follow and watch sport, that the consumption surrounding the activity generates a substantial economic contribution. While the specific economic contribution of sport fans is difficult to measure, it has been suggested that the sport industry contributes more to Australia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than other key industries such as defence, rail, iron, steel, and motor vehicles and parts (Confederation of Australian Sport, 1998). The economic contribution of the sport industry is not unique to Australia, for example, studies in the UK have suggested that in 1995 sport accounted for 2.33% of total consumers’ expenditure (cf. Gratton & Taylor, 2000).

In addition to its economic contribution, sport has become an integral part of the social lives of many. Through the following of sports, consumption communities are formed around a sport or team’s brand (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Specifically, fans who are continual users of a particular brand (often surrounding a team) become part of a community. The community encompasses not only fellow consumers of fans, spectators, and media users, but extends also to a real or imagined connection to players, officials, and others involved in the production of professional team sport. Brunt (2000) suggests that sport is one of few activities in the modern world that brings people together and creates a sense of community. Fans invest a large amount of time and money in order to acquire and display products and symbols that represent membership in, or belongingness to a particular consumption community (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Wann et al., 2001). Further, the belongingness to or identification with a particular consumption community also promotes further consumption of goods that have particular relevance unity or subculture (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).
From a marketing standpoint, understanding the behaviours of the sport fans and the consumption communities which they form is integral to the financial success and viability of sport teams and the economy of cities and towns which host them. Research on sport fans has typically sought to understand fans in terms of motives for attendance at home games (Sloan, 1989; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995; Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989), or following media broadcasts (Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Wenner & Gantz, 1998). Motives identified have included group affiliation, family involvement, aesthetic appreciation, self-esteem, economics, eustress (pleasurable stress related to the suspense of not knowing the outcome of the game), and entertainment. However, the behaviours of sport fans extend beyond home game attendance, and television viewing. There is an element of sport fan behaviour that involves travel to follow the team at away games. Recent research notes that sport fans can take on the role of tourist by travelling to watch their team play (e.g., Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; 2003). Gibson et al. (2003) note that “around the world, thousands of people travel significant distances to watch their favourite sports on a regular basis” (p. 181). Gratton and Taylor (2000) suggest that sport related travel accounts for 7% of total expenditure on sport. Although a small percentage of the total, this nonetheless represents a substantial aggregate expenditure. The Australian Bureau of Statistics suggested that in 2002, 3.25 million Australians took domestic holidays to watch or actively participate in sport. Further, the Travel Industry Association of America, estimated that event sport tourism in the United States generates $27 billion a year (Travel Industry Association of America, 2001). From a sport perspective, there is a need to understand fan travel as another element of sport consumption. From a tourism perspective, there is a need to understand fan travel as the sport tourism experience has the ability to substantially contribute to the economic impact of sport events, and increase awareness of the host destination. Yet we know very little about fans who travel to follow their team. There is a consequent need to understand the motives and experiences associated with travel to follow a sport team at away games in order to gain a wider understanding of the motives and behaviours of sport fans, and the consumption communities in which they are embedded.

Existing research on sport fans has highlighted the central role that a shared identity plays in understanding motives and behaviours (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Holt, 1995; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1985; Wakefield, 1995; Wann, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Specifically, it has been suggested that sport provides ample opportunities for collective behaviour as sport provides “foci of simultaneous common interest” (Dunning, 1999, p. 3), which form a central source of social identity for many.
Thus, research on identity and sport consumers consistently utilizes group classifications and categories pertaining to identification with a particular team (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Madrigal, 1995; Underwood et al., 2001; Wann et al., 2001) and identification with a particular sport subculture (e.g., Donnelly & Young, 1988; Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998; Haggard & Williams, 1992; Wheaton, 2000) to understand and explain sport behaviours.

Through identification with a particular sport team, fans are believed to derive self-esteem from group membership and to internalise a team’s successes and failures (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Wann et al., 2001). Further, theories of collective behaviour have been used to understand deviant behaviours such as spectator aggression and violence between supporters of different teams (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Mann, 1989). This existing work on sport fans has been primarily concerned with those who attend home games, follow a team through media, or purchase team-related products (Bryant, Zillmann, & Raney, 1998; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James & Gladden, 2002; Wann, 1995; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999). However little is known about away game attendance and related sport tourism opportunities. Unless a fan is situated outside of the town of the team that he/she follows, some form of travel is required to attend an away game. The scheduling of games in most national sporting leagues affords the opportunity for teams to play approximately half of their games at away venues. The geographic spread of teams provides ample opportunity for sport tourism experiences related to game attendance.

Three types of sport tourism have been identified by Gibson (1998): active sport tourism (travel to participate in sport), event sport tourism (travel to watch or view sport), and nostalgia sport tourism (travel to visit sport museums, halls of fame and stadia, or to participate in themed cruises). Travel to attend an away game as a spectator is a form of event sport tourism. To date, the main focus of event sport tourism research has been on the economic impact of large-scale sport events (Burgan & Mules, 1992; Crompton, 1995; Mules & Faulkner, 1996; Walo, Bull, & Breen, 1996). This is largely an artefact of the criteria dictated by governmental agencies that subsidise funding to sport events. In many instances, government evaluations focus solely on the economic impact that a sport event brings to a host destination. It has been suggested, however, that smaller-scale events such as regular season games may also benefit the host community because the marginal cost of event provision is small since these events are hosted within existing infrastructure which limits need for public expenditure, and engenders strong levels of community support (Higham, 1999).

Professional sport franchises can become symbols of the community as a whole and thus stimulate community support for sport events that feature the home team (White, Donnelly, & Nauright, 1997). Support at these events is not limited to those who constitute
the hometown community, as it also includes fans residing outside of the host community who travel to support the visiting team.

The importance of sport subcultures to sport tourism has been well demonstrated, and is not limited to fans. While focusing on individuals participating in a tournament, rather than sport fans, Green (2001) argues that sport tourism is one avenue through which participants can parade and celebrate a shared subcultural identity. Further, Green and Chalip (1998) suggest that individuals are motivated to engage in sport tourism experiences to celebrate their sport’s subculture. Recent work by Gibson et al. (2003) has examined the tourist behaviours of fans who travel to follow a university football team’s home games. Drawing inferences from interviews with fans who travelled to home games, Gibson et al. suggest that those who travel to away games are more likely to exhibit traditional tourism behaviours (e.g., sightseeing, or taking a tour) than those travelling to home games, and thus have a greater economic impact on the host destination. Yet, little is known about the travel process itself, or the decision processes of fans choosing to travel. From the standpoint of marketing sport teams and destinations it is important to understand the decision processes of fans choosing to travel, as well as the experiences that are had while travelling.

Given the focal point that identification with a group plays in other sport consumption activities, event sport tourism might be best understood in terms of group travel. The phenomenon of group travel itself has received relatively little research attention. Only a handful of studies exist which address the topic of group travel specifically (e.g., Crompton, 1981; Gorman, 1979; Quiroga, 1990; Schuchat, 1983), although related studies have focused on the features of organized package and guided tours (Holloway, 1981; Schmidt, 1975; Thomson & Pearce, 1980). The research focusing on group travel has examined collectives of strangers who travel by coach (Gorman, 1979; Quiroga, 1990; Schuchat, 1983), with nothing in common apart from joint participation on a trip. These individuals are said to develop into a group through shared experience on the trip. One would assume that travel to an away game to follow a sport team would bring with it an added element of commonality: the shared interest in the team. However there is no guarantee that fans who travel know others who travel with them.

Studies of group travel have emphasised the emergence of a group, and the various comforts afforded by a shared travel experience. These studies highlight how the evident distinctions and segregation between in-group (those on the trip), and out-groups (those who are not on the trip) influence behaviour. Those who travel to an away game will come in contact with distinct out-groups at the destination, or at least at the game: supporters of another team, and supporters of the same team who didn’t travel with the group. Thus, it is likely that intergroup processes play a significant role in this type of event sport tourism. An understanding of both intragroup and intergroup processes surrounding event sport tourism will provide valuable insight to marketers and managers who seek to understand and influence consumer behaviour, especially as much of consumption is believed to be collective.
behaviour influenced by subculture (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Further, the insights can inform much more than just our understanding of event tourism. The process of group formation and the nature of both intragroup and intergroup relationships and processes have important implications for research throughout the social sciences (e.g., sociology, psychology, community development, human resource management). Sport provides a particularly appealing context in which to study group processes.

The benefits of using sport as a context to study such consumption behaviours are threefold. First, much of the behaviour of sport fans (both in-group and out-group) is public and therefore suited to study. Second, barriers and distinctions between groups (e.g., fans of one team versus those of another) are easily identifiable, and often highly visible. Third, sport fans have been shown to exhibit high levels of identification with a team that they support (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Wann et al., 2001), which ultimately directs higher levels of consumption (Fairley, Green, & Chalip, 2005).

In summary, while people can and do participate in and observe sporting activities while travelling, the purpose of this research is to begin to understand the phenomenon of fan travel by examining the behaviours and experiences (both intragroup and intergroup) of those who travel for the purpose of following their favourite sport team at an away game – a form of event sport tourism. As this area has received little attention in the past, the study will be largely exploratory. It will draw upon existing research surrounding sport spectators and fans, subcultures, sport tourism, and group travel.

This study examines the travel of fans of teams in the Australian Football League (AFL). The AFL is a well-established national league with wide geographic dispersion. The AFL has teams located in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia, with additional games played in Tasmania and Canberra. Thus, the sport provides ample opportunity for travel to follow a team.

The purpose of this study is to create a conceptual framework by which we can begin to understand those who travel to follow a sport team at away games. This study provides both theoretical and practical insight into the motives and experiences of those who travel to follow sport teams, and will therefore inform those who are concerned with the study, and the marketing of sport and tourism. The conceptual framework that emerges as a result of this investigation will provide insight into group processes and experiences, and consumption choices from which marketing strategies will be derived. As little is known about those who travel to follow sport teams, an exploratory method is appropriate. While sport marketing studies have traditionally been concerned with understanding fan behaviours, tourism studies have traditionally been concerned with understanding tourism behaviours. Without limiting the scope of the research to the perspective of a singular discourse, this study utilises a grounded theory which will allow a more holistic understanding of fans who travel to follow sport teams.
The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding into what motivates fan travel, the experiences that fans seek and have when travelling to follow a team, and finding what place travelling to follow a team in the overall consumption behaviours of sport fans.

Research Questions

- What motivates fans to travel to follow AFL teams?
- What experiences do fans seek when choosing to travel to follow AFL teams?
- What experiences do fans have when travelling to follow AFL teams?
- What place does travelling to follow an AFL team have in the overall consumption behaviours of AFL fans?

This study does not seek to test hypotheses, but rather to build an understanding of the motives and experiences of those who travel to follow sport teams.

Thesis Outline

The following chapter reviews literature on sport tourism, sport events, sport fans and spectators, sport subcultures, sport event travel, and group travel. Chapter three describes the research setting and outlines the method used in this study. The findings of this study are discussed in chapters four, five, six, and seven, which address group structure, trip organization, socialisation, and group experience and reaction to game outcome, respectively. Chapter eight considers theoretical and practical implications derived from the research findings.
CHAPTER TWO
Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of key literatures that may inform an understanding of fans who travel to follow sport teams. As we know little about fans who travel to follow sport teams, this research utilises an inductive, grounded theory methodology. Therefore, anchoring the study on any one existing theory or discipline would not be adequate to describe the phenomenon under study. Instead, a variety of literatures are reviewed which may inform the study. This chapter reviews literature pertaining to sport tourism, subcultures, group identification of sport fans, group travel, and event sport tourism. The research on sport tourism is reviewed as travelling to follow one’s team is essentially participating in a sport tourism experience. As behaviour in both participating and spectating in sport has been understood in group and collective terms such as group identification and subculture, the literature on subculture and group identification of sport fans is reviewed. The literature on group travel is reviewed as travel to follow a sport team is often undertaken in a group setting. Further, the research on event sport tourism (travelling to watch a sport event) is reviewed. First, the convergence of sport and tourism is discussed, along with a definitional overview of sport tourism, and the effects of the convergence. The second part examines the influence of subcultures and group identity of sport fans. This leads to the final section in this chapter that addresses group travel.

Participation in sport tourism is not a recent phenomenon as evidence of travelling to participate in and watch sport has been documented from as far back as ancient Greece (Golden, 1998; Guttman, 1986). However research into sport tourism is still in its infancy. Research over the past decade in sport tourism has addressed the convergence of governance and policy in sport and tourism (Chalip, 2001; Glyptis, 1991; Walo, et al., 1996; Weed, 2003; Weed & Bull, 1997), and the benefits of hosting sport events for tourism gain to a destination (Irwin & Sandler, 1998; Lynch & Veal, 1996; Mules & Faulkner, 1996). The primary focus of sport tourism research has thus been on the tourism benefits afforded by the sport tourism relationship, with special emphasis on economic benefits to the host destination from the tourism generated around a sport event (Irwin & Sandler, 1998; Mules & Faulkner, 1996), and the ability of the host destination to promote a positive destination image through showcasing a sport event (Brown, Chalip, Jago & Mules, 2002; Chalip, 2001; Chalip, Green & Hill, 2003). Most of this research has looked at hallmark events, that is, events of “international status which are held on either a regular or one time basis” (Hall, 1989, p. 263). Although the linkage between sport and tourism has been used to market and promote destinations through hosting large-scale events, little research has sought to understand the motives and experiences of people who travel to spectate at regular season competitions. In an increasingly competitive marketplace it is important for sport marketers and those who market destinations (and cities) to understand the motives and experiences of their consumers including those who engage in travel to watch a sport event. Additionally, understanding fans
who travel to follow sport teams has wider social application. In particular, as travelling to away games is essentially done in one’s discretionary time, understanding the associated behaviours and experiences provides insight into how individuals construct, and interact within their leisure time.

In order to gain a better understanding of those who travel to follow sport teams it is useful to draw on existing literature including sport tourism, subcultures and group identities of sport fans, and group travel. The following section starts by reviewing current definitions of sport tourism.

Defining Sport Tourism

Not unlike sport and tourism as separate forms, definitions of sport tourism have varied. Delpy (1998) defines sport tourism as "travel away from home to play sport, watch sport, or to visit a sport attraction including both competitive and non-competitive activities" (p. 23). Consistent with other authors (e.g., Glyptis, 1991; Hall, 1992) who distinguish between physical participation in sport activities as a motivation for travel and attendance at a sport event as a motivation for travel, Delpy (1998) suggests that sport tourism can either be active or passive in nature. Specifically, she suggests that individuals can actively engage in physical sporting activity, passively watch (or spectate at) a sporting event, or visit sporting sights and museums. Gibson (1998) labels these three forms of sport tourism as active sport tourism, event sport tourism, and nostalgia sport tourism respectively. This tripartite categorisation is commonly agreed upon, however different terminologies are often used, as can be seen in Standeven and DeKnop’s (1999) conceptualisation of sport tourism. Standeven and DeKnop define sport tourism as “the temporary movement of people beyond their own home and work locality involving experiences unlike those of everyday life” (p. 58). This overall definition in itself says nothing about sport, however examining the process that they used to derive the definition gives a clearer specification of their definition.

In defining sport, tourism, and sport tourism, Standeven and DeKnop (1999) suggest that:

Sport is about an experience of physical activity, tourism about an experience of travel and place. The sport product is not the activity itself; nor is the tourism product equal to its vehicle or destination. Rather, "their value is a function of the quality and quantity of experience they promise" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 23) as cited in Standeven and DeKnop (1999, p. 7).

The overall sport tourism experience, (which is used in their sport tourism definition) is believed to be a combination of both tourism and sport experiences. Consistent with Delpy (1998), Standeven and DeKnop (1999) make a further distinction between the active and passive sport experience. Active sport involvement refers to active participation in physical activity, whereas passive sport involvement refers to watching or attending sporting games or events. Standeven and DeKnop's typology of the sport tourist focuses heavily on their multiple categorisations of active sport tourists (e.g., organised holiday sport activities, independent holiday sport activities, multiple sport activity holiday (camps, clubs, adventure
sports), single sport activity holiday (adventure sports, sporting tours, sport festivals), whereas they only break down passive sport tourists into connoisseurs and casual observers. Connoisseurs are believed to have the sport experience as the main reason for the trip, whereas casual observers are those who passively observe a sporting activity, building, or museum as a subsidiary activity on their trip.

The distinction between active and passive sport experience can be somewhat misleading when used with reference to sport tourism. The distinction merely addresses the nature of the sport experience and fails to consider the active nature of the overall sport tourism experience. The sport tourism experience is an interactive one; it draws from all senses. It includes the sights that one sees, the aromas that one smells, the sounds that one hears, the textures that one touches, and the objects that one tastes while on tour. In other words, while sport tourists may be passive observers of sport, they are nonetheless actively participating in the sport tourism experience. For example, if an individual travels to follow a favourite team, then they are actively engaging in a tourism experience while also actively engaging in a passive sport experience. Gibson’s (1998) label of event sport tourism rather than passive sport tourism alleviates this definitional confusion by eliminating the word passive from the title.

Sport tourism has been further defined based around the type of attraction or event at a destination which may attract the sport tourist. For example, Delpy (1998) suggests that sport tourism occurs around: attractions, resorts, cruises, tours, and events. Similarly, Redmond (1991) discusses sport vacations, sport halls of fame, facilities for the athletic tourist (including hotels, resorts and spas), multi-sport festivals, and world championships. In relation to sport tours, travelling to follow one's favourite team minimally requires travel to the game, and game attendance. However, these tours can include many extras. For example, Delpy (1998) describes tours for which companies organise packages that “fly fans to an away game, put them up in a hotel for a couple of nights, provide tickets to the contest, arrange for a cocktail party and pre-game briefing with media as well as a post-game reception with players and coaches, and then return them safely home” (p. 30).

Given the distance between teams in most national sporting leagues, and the fact that professional sport teams now play half (approximately) of their games at away venues, attendance at away games is an increasingly common sport tourism experience. In other words, travelling outside of one's "usual environment" to attend a game, constitutes a tourism experience.

Effects of Convergence

Various authors (e.g., Glyptis, 1991; Redmond, 1991; Standeven & DeKnop, 1999; Weed & Bull, 1997, 1998) have identified four opportunities afforded by the convergence of sport and tourism: economic gain, social benefit, tourism generation, and sport development. Specifically, these benefits relate to economic gain for the destination, social benefits to the host community, tourism generation through hosting mega-sport events, and holidays as
catalysts for involvement in sport. While four benefits have been identified, economic gain through tourism generation has been credited as the catalyst for the synergy between sport and tourism (Mules & Faulkner, 1996). From the standpoint of the destination marketer, the key to increasing economic impact rests with increasing tourists’ length of time and expenditure at the destination (Chalip, 2001; Frechtling, 1987), as well as increasing destination awareness and the number of tourists at the destination. Mules and Faulkner (1996) attribute the increase in government interest to the ability of events to bring benefits to the destination in terms of increased economic impact and destination awareness. In other words, by attracting participants and spectators to a host destination, sport events and attractions are seen as significant components of the tourism economy (Burgan & Mules, 1992; Delpy, 1998; Glyptis, 1991; Mules & Faulkner, 1996; Standeven & DeKnop, 1999; Walo et al., 1996). Further, increases in destination awareness come from both direct and indirect sources (cf., Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis, & Mules, 2000). Direct sources include actual experience with the destination, whereas indirect awareness is cultivated through media coverage of sport events. Recent research has begun to highlight the potential benefits of promoting the host destination through the media coverage of sport events (Chalip, et al., 2003; Dwyer et al., 2000; Green, Costa, & Fitzgerald, 2003), including the use of logos, destination postcards, and drop in announcements.

Although events are held for a plethora of non-tourist reasons, there has been a trend to exploit events for their tourism potential (Getz, 1989). Consequently, much of the research on sport tourism has focused on the benefits sport brings to tourism, with particular emphasis on the economic benefits. For example, Glyptis (1991) states, “recent years have witnessed the increasing promotion of sport as a major or minor ingredient of the holiday experience. Holidays are thus sold through the medium of sport” (p. 177). Similarly, Bramwell and Rawding (1994) posit that quality sporting facilities and major sport events are used in place marketing. However, “though sport is often used to sell holidays, the reciprocal process of using holidays to sell sport is more rare” (Glyptis, 1991, p. 178). Standeven and DeKnop (1999) maintain that the relationship between sport and tourism is symbiotic. They posit that tourism can be used in the development of sport just as sport can be used in the development of tourism. They also note that the way that tourism benefits sport receives minimal attention. While focusing predominantly on the benefits sport brings to tourism, Weed and Bull (1997) highlight the potential benefits that tourism can have on sport. First, they suggest that highlighting the potential tourism benefits from hosting an event can justify money being spent on sporting facilities. Second, they suggest that hosting a successful sport event can enhance the sporting profile of a region. Standeven and DeKnop (1999) also claim that tourism can be used in the development of sport; they focus predominantly on increases in physical (active) sport participation and tend to overlook the function that tourism may serve in the development of passive sport participation such as sport spectating and fanship.
Numerous benefits of hosting sport events have been suggested, including benefits not limited to sport and tourism per se but extending to individual political aspirations and business interests (Hall, 1993; Jennings, 1996). Detriments of hosting large sport events have also been identified. For example, Higham (1999) highlights the negative tourism implications that occur as part of hosting a sport event including scandals, boycotts, and crowding of a host destination leading to community dissention. The funding of events can also be controversial. Mules (1998) suggests that the expenditure of taxpayer funds on sport events is rarely justified by the tax revenue that the events generate. Similarly, Baade and Dye (1990) found that only one of the nine cities that they studied that had used public funds to build stadium for the purposes of hosting sport obtained a positive economic benefit. Further, Sack and Johnson (1996) suggest that public subsidies to fund sport events are not always supported by local residents, which can be problematic in that many special events rely upon the patronage of local residents and communities for their financial success (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Getz, 1997).

Higham (1999) suggests that while hosting mega-events often requires host cities to develop (or extend) facilities and infrastructure, other events (such as regular season competitions) can be hosted by existing infrastructure. The benefits of smaller scale events are threefold. First, there is a reduced need for public funding due to the already existing infrastructure. Second, the strain on existing infrastructure is often smaller than that of a mega-event, causing minimal disruption to the host community. Third, regular season competitions are often supported by high levels of hometown fanship (due to the concentration of fans of teams in home regions), therefore host community support is often favourable (Gibson et al., 2003; Hornby, 1996). Gibson and colleagues (2003) point out that the key distinction between small scale events and hallmark events is the extent to which the resources of the host city are taxed. Clearly, given the benefits of smaller scale events listed by Higham (1999), regular season games have a relatively minor impact on the host city, whereas hallmark events can be extremely taxing. Other studies on smaller scale event tourism have demonstrated that individuals would not have visited the host community if it had not been for the event (Walo, Bull, & Breen, 1996), and that there was increased community spirit generated by the event (Garnham, 1996; Gibson et al., 2003; Walo et al., 1996). Irwin and Sandler (1998) suggest the need for tourism agencies to work more closely with the host organization of these smaller scale events (e.g., a host university) to market the event and destination more closely.

In summary, although it has been widely acknowledged that the relationship between sport and tourism is a symbiotic one, most sport tourism research has focused primarily on the tourism benefits associated with the relationship. Further, this research has been centred largely on mega-events, rather than regular season competition. It has been emphasised however that regular season competitions can be hosted by existing infrastructure, engender strong levels of community support, and do not rely on government funding – all problems
associated with hosting mega-events. Therefore there is much utility for those who market sport and destinations to understand the sport tourism associated with regular season competitions. Further, developing an understanding of those who travel to follow sport teams provides insight into how individuals organise and spend their discretionary time and income, thus, informing our understanding of human behaviour.

Limited research has attempted to understand behaviour and experience of fans of tourism to away games. The consumer behaviour associated with travel to watch a sport event, especially travel to watch regular season competition is one of the least understood areas of sport tourism. In order to get a greater understanding of the consumer behaviour surrounding sport tourism it is useful to first understand the social setting in which the consumption activity takes place. The current sport literature pertaining to sport participation utilises the subculture concept to understand collective behaviour centring around a particular sport (or activity). In describing the behaviour of sport fans around a particular team or sport, the consumption community can be usefully understood in subcultural terms.

Higham (1999) posits that it is the subculture surrounding a sport that potentially transforms a regular season game into a tourism attraction, as many members of a particular sport or team’s subculture may live outside the host city. Green and Chalip (1998) concur. While not looking at travel behaviour per se but at motives for travel to a sport event, Green and Chalip (1998) emphasise the importance of the sport subculture in understanding motivation to engage in sport tourism. Similarly, research examining sport spectators and sport fans emphasises the strong role that social identification with a group plays in motivation and behaviour (Arnett & Laverie, 2001; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wann, et al., 2001). The following section explores literature relating to subcultures and identity of sport consumers.

Subculture

Donnelly (1981) defines a subculture as “a collectivity of groups and individuals who possess common cultural characteristics and who interact with each other, or who have the potential and the ability to interact with each other either directly or symbolically (i.e., through such media as magazines and newsletters)” (p. 570). Subcultures are created around a common activity that governs values, attitudes and norms (Unruh, 1980). Subcultures are powerful social entities which act as a focal point through which members derive a sense of identity and adopt and internalise the norms, beliefs, and values of the subculture (e.g., Donnelly, 1981; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998; Haggard & Williams, 1992; Wheaton, 2000). Subcultures are essentially collectives of individuals who share a common identity. The shared identity that is derived from the adoption and internalisation of group norms, beliefs and values, creates an influential point of reference that affects behaviour. The more salient an identity is in the mind of the individual, the more likely he/she is to adhere to the norms, beliefs and values of the group, and spend time and effort on maintaining that identity. Travelling to watch a team play at an away venue
provides a place through which fans can showcase and reinforce their shared identity against relevant out-groups (i.e., fans of other teams).

Adoption and internalisation of norms, beliefs and values is facilitated through social contact. The social contact need not be face to face. In fact, it is a common postulate that groups or subcultures do not need face-to-face interaction to exist, but rather, interaction may be facilitated by and communicated through media such as television, radio, and the internet (Phillips & Schafer, 1976). Subcultures then, can be dispersed worldwide, aided by the global reach of modern communication technologies. It is this dispersion of a subculture, which may make sport tourism an attractive way to parade and celebrate one’s subcultural identity at both home and away venues.

It has been suggested that sport is not a single subculture, but that different sports engender their own distinctive subcultural norms and values (cf., Green, 2001). Work on sport subcultures has focused predominately on physical participation in sports such as rock climbing, rugby union, windsurfing, and women’s football. This work demonstrates how each sport has its own distinct subcultural characteristics each with its own associated consumption patterns (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Green & Chalip, 1998; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wheaton, 2001).

With this participation-oriented focus various authors have viewed supporting behaviours such as sport fanship and spectatorship as secondary activities to actual sport participation (e.g., Donnelly, 1981; Green, 2001). For example, Green (2001) distinguishes between direct and indirect participation within a subculture and includes viewing sport, reading, and purchasing products as indirect forms of participation. Further, she suggests, “Spectating and cheering are relatively passive expressions of identity” (p. 15). However, if one’s identity were derived from a subculture of sport fans these activities would be seen more as direct participation in a subculture. They are the core components of the subculture, and therefore are not simply passive expressions of identity. Individuals then may not be involved in any form of physical sport participation but still be ardent members of a sport subculture through their fanship. It may be that a subculture of sport fans is a distinct and separate entity from a subculture of sport participants. That is, supporting a common object (e.g., team, sport or player) would be the common activity through which a sport fan subculture exists, whereas participating in a particular sport is the central nexus which unites a subculture of sport participants, each with its own unique collective identity that directs member behaviour.

Most work addressing sport fans as a social group has not specifically been concerned with subcultures per se, but has focused on identification of sport fans with a particular sport team. Specifically, research on sport consumers has addressed the central role that identity plays in understanding fan motives and behaviours such as game attendance, media viewership, and product purchases (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Cialdini et al., 1976; Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Guttman, 1986; Melnick, 1993; Sloan, 1989; Smith, 1988; Wann et
al., 2001), as well as the effects that shared identification with a team has on the consumer behaviour of sport fans (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Fairley et al., 2005; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Jones, 2000; Underwood et al., 2001; Wann et al., 2001). These studies have shown that increased levels of identification with a team lead to increased consumption including game attendance, media viewership and team related product. As travelling to follow a team is essentially another form of team related consumption, it is useful to understand how the process of identification influences behaviour. The following section reviews literature on identity, and identification, and the related effect on the behaviour of sport fans.

Identity, Identification, and Sport Fans

There is an increasing trend in consumer research to understand consumption by examining elements of self and social definition (Bagozzi, 2000; Ligas, 2000; Reed, 2002; Underwood et al., 2001). Consumption is thought to be influenced by one’s personal and social identities, which are in part derived from self-categorisations in social groups. Through the process of self-categorisation, individuals psychologically recognise themselves as belonging to a particular group, and thereby associate themselves with other members of the group. When an individual incorporates a group into his/her self-concept and experiences a sense of oneness or belongingness with that group, they are said to have identification with that particular group (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Shamir (1992) suggests that objects of identification are commonly found in the context of leisure, as leisure activities are often chosen voluntarily. Identifications with aspects of sport are therefore likely to be core identifications. Self-categorisation often leads to conformity with the goals, norms and values associated with the group (Bornwasser & Bober, 1987; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1982), including consumer behaviours. That is, individuals express their membership in a particular group by consuming goods that have particular symbolic value to that group. In the case of sport, this includes game attendance, media viewership, and purchasing licensed product (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Green, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Holt (1995) suggests that the consumption and display of team related products becomes a point of differentiation, which acts to define oneself as a sport fan, and distinguish oneself from non-fans.

Social identity theory seeks to explain behaviour of groups as an outcome of these categorisations (Tajfel, 1982). Specifically, one’s social identity “derives from his [sic] knowledge of his membership of a social group or groups” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63), and as a result is believed to influence behaviour (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity processes are fundamental to understanding collective behaviour (Turner, 1999). Group members tend to form generalisations about groups using both between-group and within-group comparisons. The groups that one is part of (or belongs to) are known as “ingroups”, and those groups that one does not belong to are referred to as “outgroups” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Individuals value their group(s) by making ingroup and outgroup
comparisons (often based on stereotypes). The need to see one’s group in a distinct and positive manner often motivates these distinctions. This also motivates the need to see other groups in a less positive manner.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) posit that a large part of an individual's identity is derived from the social surroundings (i.e., social groups and categories). Identities are therefore created and maintained through the use of consumption objects and experiences as well as personal and social interactions. The use of objects and experiences to confirm one's identity has been referred to as celebrating and parading one's identity (Green & Chalip, 1998). Not only do individuals express themselves and their identity through consumption, but individuals may also derive, or redefine their identity through a particular consumption community centred around a particular brand or activity (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Holt, 1995; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Noble & Walker, 1997). In sport, the referent brand used is often a particular sport team.

Studies into the behaviours of sport fans have typically used the notion of identification with a particular team (Arnett & Laverie, 2001; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wann, et al., 2001). Team identification is essentially a sense of belonging (or connectedness) that one feels with a team. It occurs when an individual incorporates a relationship with a particular team into his/her self-concept.

The current literature on social identity and identification pertaining to sport fans has been primarily concerned with understanding the relationships between team identification, and evaluation, expectation and reaction to game outcomes (Branscombe, Warm, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Cialdini et al., 1976; Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; Jones, 2000; Kahle et al., 1996; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann & Dolan, 1994; Wann & Schrader, 2000). It is a common postulate that higher levels of identification are connected to a team’s on-field performance (Cialdini et al., 1976; Kahle, et al., 1996; Wann et al., 2001). These studies found that fans were likely to associate themselves with the team after a victory (BIRGing – basking in reflective glory) and disassociate themselves with the team after a loss (CORFing – cutting of reflective failure) (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Similarly, studies have found that fans that have a strong psychological attachment to a team are more likely to internalise the success of a team, and externalise after a loss (Mann, 1974; Wann & Dolan, 1994; Wann & Schrader, 2000), attribute a team’s success to controllable and stable forces (Wann & Shrader, 2000), and exhibit higher levels of aggression (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999) specifically aimed at a player or coach of a rival team. These processes have all been referred to as self-serving attributions, which are utilised by fans with high levels of team identification (Wann & Dolan, 1994). As individuals seek to maintain a positive view of themselves they seek to maintain association with favourable groups that positively affect their self-image, and distance themselves from groups that they believe would negatively affect their self-image (Sirgy, 1982). Researchers have typically sought to explain the behaviour of fans in respect to the on-field success of a
team (Branscombe et al., 1993; Cialdini et al., 1976; Hirt et al., 1992; Van Leeuwen, Quick, & Daniel, 2003; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Wann & Schrader, 2000; Wann et al., 2001). Wann and his colleagues suggest that for those low in team identification, following the team is not important to their self-concept, whereas those high in team identification internalise the team’s successes and failures. Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996) suggest that success is the key reason for continuing support for a team, whereas lack of success is the key reason for discontinuing identification with a team. Jones (2000) has sought to explain why some fans continue to follow a team with a relatively unsuccessful record.

Jones derives a model of serious leisure identification based on social identity theory, as a response to Stebbins’ (1992) “profit hypothesis”, which suggests that individuals continue participation in an activity if rewards outweigh costs. In examining the behaviour of fans who follow a football team that has a relatively unsuccessful record of on-field performance, Jones (2000) suggests that when costs outweigh rewards, participation in a leisure activity may continue through individuals adopting compensatory behaviours. Specifically, Jones discusses four compensatory behaviours relating to group membership: in-group favouritism, outgroup derogation, unrealistic optimism, and voice.

Jones suggests that unrealistic optimism and voice are two ways in which fans high in identification react to the identity threat afforded by a team’s unsuccessful on-field performance. Voice refers to individuals being selective in choosing only positive aspects of being associated with a team, while unrealistic optimism refers to having an unrealistic outlook on the team’s performance. Specifically, Jones discusses two forms of unrealistic optimism displayed by fans of an unsuccessful team (1) success although unlikely is possible, and (2) modifications of the definition of what constitutes success. Wann and Dolan (1994) found that fans that are highly identified with a team were more likely to exhibit unrealistic optimism.

Other areas of research on identification that have received less attention are the relationships between level of identification and fan violence and aggression (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wann et al., 1999), knowledge of the team and its components (Wann & Branscombe, 1995), game attendance (Wann & Dolan, 1994), and other team-related consumption (Fairley et al., 2005; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Underwood et al., 2001). Further, Wann (1995) reports a significant relationship between level of team identification and motives that drive fan behaviours, such as game attendance, media viewership and purchasing licensed product. Eight motives have been identified as drivers of sport consumption. These include: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family involvement (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Sloan, 1989; Smith, 1988; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995; Zillmann et al., 1989; Zillmann & Paulus, 1993). As travelling to follow a sport team is another form of team-related consumption, it is useful to understand these motives.
Motives. Some fans are attracted to sport by the suspense or drama of not knowing the outcome of a sporting game or event (Zillmann et al., 1989). This can create a positive or pleasurable form of stress known as eustress (Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995), which often produces temporary feelings of anxiety and/or excitement. The enhancement or maintenance of one’s self-esteem has also been viewed as a primary motive for attending games (Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995; Wann et al. 1999). Fans who are motivated by the need for self-esteem are driven by the need to see themselves in a positive light. Individuals have a tendency to associate themselves with a successful team in order to bolster their self-esteem through association with the team (Branscombe, & Wann, 1991; Cialdini et al., 1976; Sloan, 1989; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000).

Sport fanship has also been seen as a temporary means for escaping from everyday life (Sloan, 1989; Smith, 1988), to obtain entertainment (Sloan, 1989; Zillmann et al., 1989), to reap economic gains through gambling (Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Guttmann, 1986), and to obtain aesthetic gratification through appreciation (the grace and beauty) of sporting competition (Guttmann, 1986; Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995).

Additionally, sport fanship (particularly game attendance) offers an opportunity for social interaction. Thus, social motives such as group affiliation and family interaction have been attributed to fans. Research has shown that social groups such as the family play a pivotal role in establishing interests in sport (Trail & James, 2001), and establishing and maintaining interest in viewing televised sport (Gantz & Wenner, 1995). Melnick (1993) describes the social nature of sport fanship this way:

[sport] not only allows large number of urbanites to come together to be entertained but also enriches their social psychological lives by helping them experience the pure sociability, quasi-intimate relationships, and sense of belonging that are so indigenous to the stands. (p. 46)

Fans have been found to have multiple motives for their behaviours (Madrigal, 1995; Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995; Wann et al., 1999). Consequently, these eight motives identified by Wann and Branscombe (1995) are by no means mutually exclusive, as fans can be attracted by one, all, or any combination of these motives. Various scales examining motives have been constructed including Wann’s (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale, and Madrigal and Howard’s (1995) FANDIM scale. Studies, which have used these scales, have typically used factor analysis to identify motive clusters. There is no consensus among the results of these studies, as various motives are eliminated based on statistical analysis (see Mahony et al., 2002 for a critique). Further, the percentage of variance explained by the various factor analyses have been low, with Mahony et al’s (2002) factor solution of seven motives accounting for only 15% of the variance. This suggests that further work needs to be done in understanding the motives of sport fans.
These motives studied to-date relate to home game attendance, media viewership, and purchasing licensed product. However, we do not know if they are the same motives that relate to travel to away games. Away game attendance is not the only avenue through which an individual can view a team's away games. Other avenues include technological advances such as the Internet, television (free-to-air, cable, and pay TV), and video technology, along with the more traditional forms of print media and radio. Therefore, it would seem that it is not solely the viewing of the game that these fans seek when deciding to travel to follow a team.

Research on sport fans has utilised the concepts of identity and identification to understand behaviour. This work has primarily been concerned with how fans react to game outcomes. It has also linked high levels of identification to increased levels of consumption. The consumption activities that have been examined include game attendance, media viewership, and purchasing licensed product. The relationship between identification and the decision to travel to follow a sport team has not been examined. However, given the central role that identity and identification play in the behaviours of sport fans, the decision to travel to follow a team (like any other consumption choice) is likely to be influenced by both self and social factors. Further, while the research on sport fans and spectators has primarily examined behaviour as a group level issue, Stebbins (1993) emphasises how serious leisure subcultures are united by a central collective activity, with many small groups existing within it. Research that has addressed the supporter subculture has been concerned with identity and identification, but not with identity or identification specifically focused on a team.

Supporter Subculture

There has been much work on the subculture of football (soccer) supporters, especially those within the United Kingdom and Europe. This work has addressed issues such as the hooliganism, working class culture, violence, and cultural nationalism. It has been suggested that soccer hooliganism was one of England’s largest social problems, which primarily involves lower working class or unemployed males (Dunning, 1999; Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1986). While some studies have viewed hooliganism as product of working class resistance towards embourgeoisement of football (Clarke, 1978; Taylor, 1982), others have suggested that the violence is a subcultural property of the working class (Williams, 1991). On the other hand, Weed (2001) suggests that is apart of the English national cultural norm to join in and taunt the opposing team’s fans without wanting to become involved in any physical violence. In his study on English fans at Euro 2000, he claims that there was much aggressive posturing, and only limited actual violence.

Other studies on supporter subcultures have been concerned with the “construction and expression of a national identity through sport” (Giulianotti, 1996, p. 334), and the “team’s function in confirming a new [national] identity” (p. 339), often referred to as “cultural nationalism”. For example, Bradley (2002) discusses how national and political consciousness and identity are instrumental in subcultures surrounding football fandom, and
how being anti-English is in fact part of the Scottish fan subculture. Similarly, Moorhouse (1987) discusses how the associated sub-nationalism inherent in Scottish culture fosters a strong rivalry between the Scottish football fans and English football. In an Australian context, Hughson (1998b) highlights how supporting a team is often used as an avenue through which to showcase ethnic identity. Specifically, he focuses on the role of ethnic identity of a group of soccer hooligans supporting a Croatian-based team in Australia’s national soccer league. He suggests that the supporter group is a “communal group which emerges from the Croatian community” (p. 406). It is therefore probable that within a given sport, distinctive values form around each team.

Work on sport participation subcultures has been primarily concerned with being socialised into a subculture and the in-group behaviours inherent in the subculture (e.g., Donnelly & Young, 1988; Green & Chalip, 1998; Wheaton, 2001), whereas the current literature on supporter subcultures has addressed inter and intragroup behaviour (E.g., Stott, Hutchinson, & Drury, 2001). For example, self-policing against supporters amongst own team fans is a form of intragroup maintenance. How supporters of one team interact with supporters of another team, including violence directed at outgroups (e.g., Armstrong & Harris, 1991; Budford, 1991; Giulianiotti, 1995; Hughson, 1998a; Murphy, Williams, & Dunning, 1990; Williams, Dunning, & Murphy, 1989) is a form of intergroup behaviour.

While the focus of these studies has not been on sport tourism per se, they do provide interesting insights into sport tourism given the international context through which many of them occur they occur. Specifically, given that hooliganism and fan violence can be generated by nationalism, the subjects under study in his research have involved fans who travel internationally to attend events and tournaments. The following section reviews the relevance of this literature to understanding sport tourism. Additionally, given the group nature of this experience, the review also includes existent literature on group travel.

**Group Travel**

Before beginning a review on the tourism associated with supporter subcultures and group travel, it is first important to note that the current literature on group travel is concerned with groups that form solely for the purpose of a trip. That is, the focus of the studies that address group travel has been on collectives of individuals who participate on packaged tours, who have minimal (if anything) in common before the trip, and are simply united by shared participation on a tour. For example, Gorman (1979) describes the evolution of a 35 person social group during a week-long packaged bus tour of Europe. He suggests that the only characteristics that bound the group were the commonalities of social status (as all participants were price conscious), and limited travel experience (as a guide and driver were present). Previous work on group travel has failed to examine the behaviours and experiences of groups that are united by more than just shared travel experience, such as shared support of a sport team. The research on sport fans presupposes a common identity – being a supporter of a particular team or club – which may act as catalyst for participation, as it has been long
established that one's circle of friends plays a role in the choice of leisure activity (e.g., Burch, 1969). Similarly, Crompton (1981) suggests that social group members play four roles in influencing tourism. First, the social group may influence individuals to participate in group travel. Second, the social group may influence an individual’s choice of the destinations and attractions visited at the destination. Third, socialisation within a social group may influence an individual’s view of a particular destination. Fourth, if members of an individual’s social group live in a distant destination, the individual may choose to travel to that destination to visit them. As social motives have also been linked to sporting activities, motivation to participate in a sport tourism experience may therefore be driven by an association with a particular social group.

There are multiple avenues through which individuals can organise travel to follow a sport team. Cohen’s (1972) categorizes tourists into four categories: the organized mass tourist, the individual mass tourist, the explorer, and the drifter. The four categories are based on the tourist’s interaction with the destination (or host community) and range on a spectrum from preferring familiarity and comfort within an “environmental bubble” to seeking novelty. The organized mass tourist seeks comfort and convenience through the use of tour agencies and tour guides, and through the use of all-inclusive packages. The individual mass tourist also seeks comfort and safety in the use tour operators, but tends to be slightly more open to novel experiences, and is more conscious of the host community than the organized mass tourist. The explorer and the drifter both organize their trips independently, and are more likely to explore the local culture, and avoid the attractions of the mass tourist.

Giulianotti (1994) suggests different forms of travel which were utilised by supporters of the Scotland Football team to attend an away game match in Romania: official packages through a service set up by the club, unofficial packages, and independent travel. Additionally, he notes that some individuals who are at the destination for business reasons, attend the away game while at the destination. These methods of travel are also likely to be adopted by fans who travel to follow sport teams to domestic matches.

In an attempt to combat the occurrence of hooliganism and violence, which generated much media coverage, the Scottish Football Association created the Scotland Travel Club (STC) to distribute tickets for matches with the proviso that participants follow a code of behaviour. However, not all fans who travel to follow the Scottish football team utilise this club as a conduit for organising trips. For example, Giulianotti (1991) found that the majority of Scottish supporters who travelled to Italy for the 1990 World Cup Finals did not utilise organised package tours.
Giulianotti (1996) posits that most of the 20,000 Irish Soccer fans who travelled to the USA for the 1994 World Cup Finals travelled together with friends and family which he attributed to the “innate sociability of Irish cultural identity overseas; a precautionary, safety-in-numbers; and a financially self-supporting arrangement, as those living in hotel rooms could share and franchise costs” (p. 326). These reasons for group travel are consistent with those identified in the group travel literature (Schuchat, 1983; Schmidt, 1979; Quiroga, 1990).

Schuchat (1983) provides an ethnographic account of the role that the group plays in travel experience in terms of identity, sociability, safety, adventure, and financial and/or temporal benefits. She suggests that tour groups provide a setting where people can experience inclusion and social support, particularly individuals going through an identity crisis. She also highlights that sharing a room with a stranger on tour is becoming more acceptable especially among those who are adventurous or price-conscious. Similarly, in examining package tours, Quiroga (1990) found that personal safety was the most important reason for choosing package tours for those 65 and over, but the least important reason for those under 26. The main reason those under 26 took a package tour was the possibility of making friends. Further, 16% of her sample suggested at the end of the trip that shared group experience was important to satisfaction. While 70% of her sample suggested that they were attracted to the idea of making new friends in the group at the beginning of the trip, at the end of the trip 87% of the sample indicated that they made good friends within the group. Approximately 92% of respondents indicated that shared group experience was valued positively at the end of the trip, thus emphasising the importance of social elements in group experiences. Schmidt (1979) focuses on the guided tour which she defines as “all forms of tourism where the itinerary is fixed and known beforehand, and which involve some degree of planning and direct participation by agents apart from the tourists themselves” (p. 441). She suggests that tours “minimize friction between tourists themselves and can set the scene for in-group solidarity… through sharing experiences and confronting the unfamiliar in a collective way” (p. 443). Similarly, Crompton (1981) identified four advantages of the social group in pleasure vacations: saving money, reducing loneliness, offering additional perspectives, and providing a forum through which to recall and reminisce about travel experience.

Activities at the destination can also vary. Giulianotti (1995b) found that Scottish fans who had chosen a package holiday to travel to a soccer tournament in Sweden had limited participation in the local festivities surrounding the tournament given that the location of the accommodation provided was not proximate to the tournament and surrounding festivities. However, this presented an opportunity for the Scottish fans to partake in a relatively conventional holiday with family and friends. While it is a common postulate that status is affected by the places that one visits (Schmidt, 1979), activities at a destination are said to differ based on previous experience travelling to follow the team and experience at the destination (Giulianotti, 1996). For example, in examining supporters who travelled to the
USA, Giulianotti found that newcomers adopted a holiday ethos engaging in the entertainment provided and the media coverage garnered from the event, while those who had travelled previously were more likely to relax in a bar drinking. These differences may also point to differences in motivation for travel.

Chalip (2001) suggests that in marketing sport tourism it is useful to determine whether sport or tourism is the primary consideration, as marketing strategies should differ according to the primary focus. For example, Nogawa, Yamaguchi and Hagi (1996) suggest that some individuals chose to partake in a sport tourism experience simply to watch a sport event with limited consideration of the destination. Similarly, Faulkner, Tideswell, and Weston (1998) speculated that the majority of international tourists travelling to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games would be “sport junkies” who would not be interested in an experience wider than the sport itself. Current research on sport tourism only considers the destination or the sport event itself as the prime attractions.

Activities en route are usually seen as incidental to the aim of the trip. However, Holloway (1981) suggests that individuals can use the travel time to meet others and socialise. Therefore, travel time may be as important as destination time. Schmidt (1979) goes as far as to suggest that for various types of tours (including singles tours) the group itself may be the main attraction. Giulianotti (1995b) notes that fans who travelled to follow the Dutch team were less likely to socialise outside of the circle of friends with whom they travelled. This is consistent with Cohen’s (1972) suggestion that: “The modern tourist is not so much abandoning his [sic] environment for a new one, as he [sic] is being transposed to foreign soil in an environmental bubble of his native culture” (p.166). Not unlike the comforts afforded by group travel, Boorstin (1961) emphasises the comfort that individuals feel in experiencing such pseudo-events. In other words, it is possible for a person to travel to another destination and be closed off from the native culture through the places that they go and the form of travel that they adopt. This is especially the case when travelling in group tours where interaction is limited to the group members – all of whom are tourists. This is consistent with work on sport subcultures that suggests that the social interaction provided by subcultural membership may become a key attraction to continued participation (Anderson & Stone, 1981; Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998). Green and Chalip (1998) further delineate how the attraction that motivates the travel to participate in a sport tournament is not the place or the people that reside at the destination, but rather the players who attend the event. Specifically, in describing a women’s football tournament, Green and Chalip suggest that the tournament provides a time and place through which a common subculture is celebrated. Further, Green (2001) suggests that sport tournaments provide the opportunity for members of a subculture to join together and parade and celebrate a common identity. Notice here that the interaction is not confined to those with whom one has travelled; it also extends to the wider group that congregate at the destination. This is not limited to sport subcultures. Schuchat (1983) uses an example of a group of optometrists meeting with a local optometrist at the
destination when they were travelling for work. However, in a sport context this may be heightened by the fact that social experience is a fundamental component of sport consumption (Green & Chalip, 1998; Holt, 1995; Mann, 1969; Rothenbuhler, 1988; Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, & Ellen, 1988). In other words, as social interaction plays a large part in sport fandom (Gibson et al., 2002) a game at any stadium affords the opportunity for sport fans to congregate and parade and celebrate a shared identity, the destination itself may not always hold central importance.

Donnelly (1981) suggests that being a member of a subculture brings with it social benefits including group involvement, sense of community, and friendships. Similarly, Burch (1969) suggests that a sense of community or subculture may develop among groups of individuals whether the focus is around a team or a related entity. Green and Chalip (1998) posit that the sense of community developed during a sport event transgresses everyday social norms. For example, traditional elements of social class are ignored. The process by which individuals momentarily neglect their differences, accept each other as social equals, and come to behave as a unitary group exhibits what Turner (1974, 1977) refers to as a liminoid state of communitas, and what Norbeck (1975) refers to as a rite of reversal. This “state of being” is referred to as a rite of reversal as the structured, institutionalised roles and statuses of everyday life are reversed to a state of anti-structure where individuals act as social equals. Giulianotti (1995b) notes a similar transgression in describing those who travel overseas to follow a team:

An appropriate way of depicting the culture of these international fans overseas is through the metaphor of ‘carnival’. Behaviourally, carnivals are characterized by an abandonment to hedonistic excess, and the psycho-social jouissance of eating, drinking, singing, joking, swearing, wearing of stylized attire and costumes, engaging in elaborate social interplay, enjoying sexual activity, etc. For these indulgences to occur, carnival can only function as ‘authorized transgression’: ‘the modern mass-carnival is limited in space: it is reserved for certain places, certain streets, or framed by the television screen’ (Eco 1984, 6).

(p.194).

Similar to Turner’s (1977) liminality, the notion of carnival brings along with it a collapse of social boundaries related to everyday roles such as social class, ethnicity, and religion (DaMatta, 1991; Ivanov, 1984). This transgression of social class has also been identified as part of the tourism experience (e.g., Gorman, 1979; Lett, 1983). For example, Gorman (1979) found that the isolation in both time and space of a tour group on a bus acts to break down traditional boundaries such as social status, race and ethnicity. Other authors have asserted that coach tours act as a closed medium, which provide physical and psychological distance between participants and the outside world (Holloway, 1981; Quiroga, 1990). Likewise, Schmidt (1979) identifies the temporary role that a tourist adopts through separating his or her everyday life in terms of “role segregation” and labels the tourist as “a
marginal person, temporarily without affiliation, except to tourism” (p. 459). This may not strictly be the case for fans who travel to follow sport teams, as one would assume that they maintain their affiliation with the team (or whichever aspect of the sport they represent) during the trip, as well as to tourism. Schmidt further suggests that there is a temporary lag in role segregation as tourists are generally partially in everyday reality on the first day of their trip, and are partially in their tourist reality on their first day back from the trip.

In discussing the experiences of sport event participants, Green and Chalip (1998) emphasise how shared subcultural identity and the transgression of social norms that occurs eases attempts at starting conversation with other participants. Similarly, various authors have highlighted a similar dissolution of social norms and breakdown of social barriers that expedite group formation. For example, Gorman (1979) discusses how the transgression of social norms can hasten the process of group formation. Quiroga (1990) suggests a number of characteristics of group tours that influence the formation and development of the group, including a shared setting for development, proximity of members during the trip, the brief existence of the group, shared circumstances, and shared experience. She suggests that group interaction, group size, the physical environment, and group cohesion are key aspects affecting the formation and development of tour groups. Similarly, Schmidt (1979) notes that prolonged frequent contact such as that provided by a group tour often generates friendship and group feeling amongst trip participants. Caplow (1968) discusses how individuals act differently within situations where they perceive that there is a definitive end. Holloway (1981) suggests that individuals travelling together in an unknown or foreign culture will feel close to one another thus resulting in higher levels of interaction. This is consistent with work on group processes suggesting that situations resulting in crisis, confrontation, danger, and/or group isolation expedite group formation (Homans, 1950). The work on group travel however, addresses groups that do not exist prior to travel, rather than existing groups, or groups with a common subcultural or group identity. Further, this work is concerned with travel for holiday purposes, not travel to view a particular event. Recent work has begun to understand the behaviours of fans who travel to sport events.

Event Sport Tourism

Recent research by Gibson et al. (2003) has addressed the tourism related behaviour of fans who travel to attend home games of the University of Florida football team. Specifically, they surveyed 181 self-identified leaders of tailgating parties, who had travelled an average of 229.3km (142.5miles) from outside of Alachua County to attend University of Florida home football games. In a second study, follow-up interviews were conducted with 20 of the 181 respondents. Three key themes were identified when examining the tourism related behaviours of fans who attended University of Florida football games: (1) being a fan, (2) participating on pilgrimages to the mecca of Gator football, and (3) being on the road with the team. In this case, being a fan relates to individuals’ self-professions that they are fans of the Gator football team or, more broadly, to Gator sports. Pilgrimage to the Mecca equates to
individuals making their way to Gainesville. Most social worlds have a geographical centre (Unruh, 1980), attributed as the hometown or place of origin, which often acts as a pilgrimage centre. For the University of Florida football team, this is Gainesville. While Gibson et al. did not interview fans of opponents at the data collection site, inferences were drawn from interviews with the Gator fans about their away game attendance. Gibson et al. suggest that fans who travel to home games generally stay with friends or relatives at the destination, whereas fans of opposing teams may exhibit more traditional tourist behaviours. Specifically, they suggest that while the main activities while attending home games are attending the game and socializing (still spending money on food and shopping), when travelling to an away game most fans preferred to include sightseeing or taking a tour. Fans attending a team’s away games may therefore be a greater source of tourism potential for the host city.

In another American collegiate setting, Irwin and Sandler (1998) analysed the spending behaviour of sport tourists (visiting event patrons) based on team affiliation. They used the following categories to segment affiliation with a university sport event: a student, a relative of a player, a university employee, or an alumnus. They found that respondents who demonstrated affiliation with a team competing in the event reported greater spending (on food, lodging, entertainment, transportation, and retail shopping), showed a higher daily per capita spending, and stayed almost a full day longer (3 days compared to 2.3 days) than those who were unaffiliated.

Gibson et al. (2002) suggest that family life cycle affects the number of away games one attends. Specifically they claim, “as children had grown up they [the parents] had attended more away games, taking their children with them,” (p. 13), and that old age may prevent individuals from driving to the same number of away games that they attended when they were younger. Further, they predict that the success of a team may be linked to fans attending more away games whereby winning teams attract more of their fans to away games. However, Giulianotti’s (1996) ethnographic account of Irish soccer fans at the 1994 World Cup Finals in the USA suggests that approximately 20,000 Irish fans travelled to the USA to support their team. Their trips were not dependent on the Irish team’s appearance in the finals, and therefore not on the success of the team. He further suggests that during the actual play Irish supporters were relatively quiet even though they had between 30,000 and 50,000 supporters at each match. Giulianotti (1994) notes similar characteristics of the Scottish supporters suggesting that the lack of on-field success of the Scottish National team has little effect on the “ambassadorial conduct” of the Scottish Football fans. Thereby illustrating, the on-field success of the team may have little affect on those who travel to follow sport teams.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The behaviour of sport fans has typically been understood as an outcome of a shared or collective identification with a sport team (Fairley et al., 2005; Sutton et al., 1997; Underwood et al., 2001). In particular, research on sport fans has consistently utilised group classifications and categorisations to understand and explain behaviours relating to home
game attendance, the viewing of media, and purchasing licensed products. Little however is known about the behaviours of sport fans who travel to attend away games. Travelling to follow a sport team is not simply an experience of sport, as it also includes an element of tourism. In fact, the experience of travelling to an away game is a unique amalgam of sport and tourism – one that we know little about. It would seem that it is not solely the viewing of the game that these fans seek when deciding to travel to away games, as they can view the game via media sources such as television, radio, and the internet.

Recent research by Gibson et al. (2002, 2003), has begun to understand the sport fan in the context of tourism, examining the tourism behaviours of those that travel to follow a collegiate sport team. This research suggests that “being a fan,” or defining oneself as a fan is an important aspect of travelling to follow a team. Thus fans who travel to follow a team accept being a fan as a relevant self-definition and/or social categorisation. It is therefore useful to examine fan travel from a group context. Social identity theory allows us to understand the behaviour of groups as an outcome of these social categorisations. Further, while Gibson et al. looked at the behaviours of fans who travel to follow home games, they suggest that fans who travel to away games are more likely to display traditional tourist behaviours, and have a greater economic impact on the host destination.

Research on groups in a tourism context has primarily focused on groups that come together for the purposes of travel, rather than those that travel based on a shared identity. However, similarities have been shown to exist between experiences based on a shared identity at a sport event and experiences gained through group travel such as a transgression in social norms that affects behaviour. The experiences of those who travel in groups can inform our understanding of fans who travel to follow sport teams.

To get a better understanding of this market, it is useful to understand the behaviours of fans who travel and experiences sought during a trip. While this research clearly has practical implications for those who market sport teams and/or destinations, the research also lends to the development of theory on group behaviour and group processes. In particular, given the behaviour of sport fans is thought to be collective behaviour, sport provides an appealing context in which to study both inter-group and intra-group behaviour and processes.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

This chapter provides the methodological framework and application of methods used throughout this research project. As little was known about those who travel to follow professional sport teams, it was useful to adopt an exploratory, qualitative research method. Adopting an exploratory research method allowed for a detailed examination of the behaviours and experiences of this previously unexplored market. Given our limited knowledge of fans who travel to follow professional sport teams, a grounded theory approach was most useful. The first section of this chapter outlines the epistemological framework used in this study, followed by an outline of the dominant research approach that has been utilised in studies on sport fanship and identity. The second section details the characteristics of the grounded theory methodology used in this study, its appropriateness to address the research topic, and its practical application. The third section gives a full description of the research setting, choice of data collection sites and informants.

Epistemological Framework

This study was based within a qualitative epistemology, as this is the most appropriate standpoint to address the underlying questions of this research – understanding those who travel to follow professional sport teams. Stemming from sociology and anthropology, qualitative methodologies are often used in social sciences to gain an understanding of participant action and meaning in different social worlds (Hammersley, 1989; Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Qualitative research takes place in natural settings of human interaction, using a multi-method approach. Traditional quantitative measures of validity are not used, but rather triangulation (through combining multiple methods and cross-referencing them) adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the analysis (Flick, 1992). Essentially, the researcher acted as the primary research instrument by observing and/or using other forms of data collection such as interviews and document analysis, thereby allowing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. As a result, the data that emerged from this qualitative study are largely descriptive in nature detailing the perceptions and experiences of participants and the related processes that occurred (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990).

The current literature on sport fans is based predominantly in a quantitative epistemology, measuring various motives (e.g., Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Wakefield, 1995; Wann, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993), and other attitudinal constructs such as identification, commitment, and loyalty (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Madrigal, 1995; Underwood, et al., 2001; Wann, et al., 2001). The majority of these studies have focused upon home game attendance, media viewership, and product purchases. Only a handful of studies that examine the behaviour of sport fans have utilised qualitative methods (e.g., Gibson et al., 2002; 2003; Jones, 2000), focusing predominantly on fan violence and hooliganism (e.g., Armstrong & Harris, 1991; Budford, 1991; Giulianotti, 1995; Hughson, 1998a; Murphy, et al., 1990; Williams, et al., 1989). As the behaviours and
experiences of those who travel to follow sport teams had not previously been explored, it was useful to utilise exploratory analysis. Grounded theory is a methodology that involves theory development that is grounded in the data. The process involves systematically (and simultaneously) gathering and analysing data, working dialectically between the data and the literature. While grounded theory involves mostly the same data gathering techniques as other qualitative methodologies such as observation, conversation, and interviews, the emphasis of grounded theory is on the development of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In other words, it is the emergent research process that is directed by (and discovered in) the data that differentiates it from other methods.

Grounded theory and constant comparison were employed in this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Straus and Corbin, 1998). The process involved constant comparisons among data as they were collected, as well as between data and existing theory and knowledge. Unlike other methodologies where the literature sets the scene and directs the questioning, in grounded theory it is the actors in the social setting who set the scene. Specifically, the researcher begins with a set of experiences or a social setting that he/she wants to explore, but ultimately it is the actors in the setting who shape the analysis. The researcher then identifies core variables through systematic coding procedures. The core variables then act as a pivotal link between data collection and conceptual formation. These codes are checked and expanded by collecting and comparing more data, including data from the setting and from existing literature (Glaser, 1978). The emphasis, however, is not on coding per se (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), but on the development of theory through the iterative process of constant comparison.

Mullen and Reynolds (1978) suggest that the grounded theory approach may more accurately describe a social world under investigation, as preconceived hypotheses are not necessary when entering the situation. That is, through direct contact with the social world, the researcher can determine elements that hold particular meaning or importance to the participants’ world, rather than simply investigating preconceived hypotheses. Since little is known about fans who travel to follow a professional sport team, grounded theory is used in this study. Before proceeding to a discussion of the data collection procedures and methods of analysis it is first useful to describe the research setting.

Research Setting

Data collection was confined to one particular sport: Australian Rules Football, and one particular league: the AFL (Australian Football League). The AFL was chosen as it is a well-established league in Australia that is spread throughout the country. The sport is played in all six states and two territories, but the five states account for all sixteen teams in the professional league (Victoria, 10; New South Wales, 1; Queensland, 1; South Australia, 2; Western Australia, 2). However, in line with the AFL’s goals of further geographical expansion, matches are played in both the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), and Tasmania, leaving the Northern Territory as the only territory that does not host any games. It is useful
to understand the history, size and scope of the league. The following scope provides a brief history of the AFL.

The AFL. Australian Rules Football is Australia’s largest spectator sport, attracting in excess of fourteen million spectators across all levels of the game. In addition to the large spectator base, the Australian Rules Football also lays claim to having Australia’s third largest sport participation base. The professional Australian Rules Football league in Australia is called the AFL (Australian Football League). In 2000, the top-tier AFL competition attracted over 6.3 million game attendees. The AFL commanded $111 million of revenue in 2000 with the major sources of revenue coming from corporate sponsorships and broadcasting rights ($34.935 million), and match income ($25.984 million). (cf., www.afl.com.au). As AFL is Australia’s largest spectator sport with teams spread across Australia, it is an appropriate setting through which to study fans who travel to follow sport teams.

In order to understand the dispersion of the clubs in the AFL it is important to detail a brief history of the AFL. Australian Rules Football as a sport emerged in Victoria in 1858. The initial intention of the organisers was to provide cricketers with an avenue through which to keep fit and competitive during the off-season (Winter). The first football club, the Melbourne Football Club was established in 1859, with the second club, Geelong, forming two months later. The first league, the Victorian Football League (VFL), was established in 1896, with eight foundation clubs (Melbourne, Geelong, Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, St Kilda, and South Melbourne). The league gradually expanded to include four more Victorian based clubs (Richmond in 1908, and Footscray, Hawthorn, and North Melbourne all in 1925). The first infiltration outside of Victoria came in 1982 when the South Melbourne club was moved to Sydney (New South Wales), and renamed the Sydney Swans. Five years later in 1987, to further nationalise the game, the league expanded into Queensland (the Brisbane Bears), and Western Australia (the West Coast Eagles). Indicative of the desire to further expand nationally, the league was renamed the Australian Football League (AFL). The league continued its national expansion by introducing a team in South Australia in 1991 (the Adelaide Crows), a second team in Western Australia in 1995 (the Fremantle Dockers), and a second team in South Australia (Port Adelaide Power) in 1997. In 1996 Fitzroy merged with Brisbane to form the Brisbane Lions, however maintained its base in Brisbane to sustain a team in Queensland (Hutchinson & Ross, 1998). During the 2001 season, the season in which data were collected for this study, the league consisted of 16 clubs spread nationally.

The 2001 season consisted of a 22 round national competition followed by a final series. The season began in the last week of March and concluded on the last Saturday in September, with games taking place mainly on Friday nights, Saturday afternoons and nights, and Sunday afternoons. There were also a few games played on public holiday Mondays (Easter Monday, and the Queen’s birthday), and Thursdays (e.g., ANZAC Day).
Since some teams are distant from the majority of the league (especially the Western Australian teams), the league seeks to ensure that there is equity in the travel that teams must undertake, as they are aware of the toll that lengthy travel can have on team performance. As a result, the teams do not have an equal number of home and away matches as there are various elements that the league considers when developing the fixtures. The league seeks to ensure that each team plays at least once in all markets (all states) during the season. Further, the league also takes into consideration requests from different clubs, and contracts with various stadia (e.g., the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Colonial Stadium) when designing the fixture, which ultimately affects the number of home and away games that each team plays.

In order to provide patrons (game attendees) with the best possible match facilities, the AFL adopted a ground rationalisation policy. In doing so, the AFL has invested over $1 billion in stadium infrastructure around the country. In 2001, regular season matches were played predominantly in nine stadia around the country, most with a capacity to hold at least 35,000 patrons. These include the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), Colonial Stadium, Optus Oval, and Shell Stadium in Victoria, Subiaco Oval and the Western Australia Cricket Association (WACA) ground in Western Australia, Football Park in Adelaide, the Gabba in Queensland, and the Sydney Cricket Ground in New South Wales. Additionally, two games during the season were held at both Manuka Oval in Canberra, and York Park in Tasmania. These stadia, and by extension destinations are the only places to which fans of AFL teams can travel to follow their team.

The Sport Tourism Experience

At bare minimum, the sport tourism experience involves: (1) travel to and from the game (i.e., transportation), and (2) attendance at a game. For some but not all trips, accommodation is also required. Prime data collection sites therefore include: the trip departure and arrival points, the transportation itself, the game venue, and the accommodation locations. Pre-game and post-game functions, supporter gatherings, and the AFL clubs themselves were also used as data collection sites. Using these sites, I was able to observe the behaviours of the travel participants, to interact directly with them, and to inquire and interview about any observations. At these sites, I was able to observe (1) the social interactions (or lack of social interactions) that take place within the various groups (i.e., in-group activities), (2) the rituals and activities that the groups participated in throughout the entire experience, (3) the interactions between the travel group and any outsiders (4) other activities that the groups participated in whilst away.

The informants in this study included participants who undertook interstate travel to follow a professional sport team, as well as those who organise or play a part in such experiences. The following section describes the data collection procedures, case selection and methods of analysis used in this study.
Data Collection

Data were collected during the 2001 AFL season. Specifically, six case studies form the basis of data collection. These included trips during rounds two (Port Adelaide), three (West Coast), four (Brisbane), seven (Fremantle), eighteen (Geelong), and twenty-one (St Kilda) of the season. Throughout the research process, data were collected using participant observation, ethnographic interviews, casual conversation with informants, and document analysis. These methods of data collection are discussed in the following section. The case selection is described followed by a discussion of each case site and its data collection procedure. Data were organised and analysed during and after each case. As prescribed by grounded theory, each case was informed by those that came before it.

Participant observation was a useful technique to employ as there was little knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Spradley, 1980). In this study, I switched between the roles of “active observer” and “moderate observer” (Spradley, 1980). The active observer participates in the same activities that the subjects do to learn the cultural values and behaviours of the group, while the moderate observer seeks to maintain a balance between participation and observation. In other words, the moderate observer plays a less active role, and maintains some distance, trying not to become too involved in the activities. The purpose for this is twofold. First, it would be unethical for me to have been seen as supporting one team one week and another the next. Second, this allowed me to distance myself from the supporters of some teams, and become immersed in the culture of others. Field notes were recorded during and on completion of each observation.

During each trip, interviews were conducted with key informants who were participants on the trips themselves, as well as with those who organised or played a pivotal role in the trip (e.g., the bus driver). Given the rapidly changing nature of the setting, in most instances interviews were not pre-scheduled but were prompted by the author as the setting allowed. Interviews were tape-recorded. Tape recordings were made only with the interviewees’ consent. However, while most interviews were tape-recorded, others were not. This was dependent upon the role which I played in the participant observation, as well as the level of background noise. Additionally, casual conversation with informants became a vital data source. Casual conversations were not audio-taped, but were recorded as field notes. In some instances, what started out as casual conversation either developed into an informal interview, or became the basis for probes in further interviews. The probes that were used were resultant of key themes and categories that emerged through the data collection process, and were subsequently used to check and expand on the major themes and categories. Details of the specific methods applied in each case are described in the section below.

By combining both observation and interview techniques, I was able to use interviews to further probe and interpret what was observed, and similarly, use observation to interpret and gain a further understanding of interview responses. In other words, I was continuously analysing the data and extracting key themes and categories, which then directed further
Thus, the data were gathered and compared through a combination of methods which formed the basis for thick description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study (cf., Geertz, 1973). Thick description requires the researcher to capture the meaning associated with behaviours and experiences. Geertz’s notion of thick description in interpreting cultural settings is congruent with the tenets of grounded theory, as theorisation is inductive and grounded in the actors’ interpretation. Thus, adopting a grounded theory methodology allowed me to understand the motives and experiences of fans who travel to follow professional sport teams.

**Case Selection**

Only six of the sixteen teams in the AFL are based outside of Victoria – the Brisbane Lions (Queensland), the Sydney Swans (New South Wales), the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers (Western Australia), and the Adelaide Crows and Port Adelaide Power (South Australia). Consequently, the selected cases had to involve these teams, whether it be travel to follow the team, or travel to play against one of these teams. The fact that a team is playing interstate, however, does not necessarily mean that there will be fans travelling to follow the team. Therefore, it was not simply a process of identifying teams that were playing interstate. Rather, it was necessary to identify existing opportunities to travel to follow the team.

I searched the websites of all 16 AFL clubs, and contacted each club by telephone to identify the opportunities that existed for interstate travel to follow their team. As a good cross-section of cases was needed for comparison, the author identified possible trips by considering representation from each state, team performance, club history, and time of the season. Given the national dispersion of teams in the AFL, it was useful to obtain a representation of travel to and from each state. This is important as travel distances to games differ depending on where the team is located (which affects travel time and cost), as does the tradition of sport in each state. As studies of sport fans suggest that support for a sport team waxes and wanes along with the team’s on-field performance (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976), it is necessary to include teams with a history of on-field success and those without. Coinciding with the on-field success of the team is the time of the season in which fans travel. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that there is a higher percentage of fans who travel toward the end of the season during the finals series, thus including mainly teams that had been successful throughout the season. Further, both temporal and financial constraints affect the choice of trips. This was accentuated by the fact that the author lives in the state of Queensland, and therefore had to travel first to the departure point of each trip in order to participate and conduct research on the trip.

Based on the above criteria, six case studies were selected: travel to follow (1) Port Adelaide Power (South Australia), (2) Brisbane Lions (Queensland), (3) West Coast Eagles and (4) Fremantle Dockers (Western Australia), and (5) Geelong Cats and (6) St Kilda Saints (Victoria). A summary of the key features of the teams, and the related travel groups can be
found in Appendix A. The author also planned a trip with the Sydney Swans (New South Wales), so that all states were included. However, the trip was cancelled due to a lack of participants. The reasons for this are discussed further in Chapter Seven. In investigating the opportunities that were available for fans to travel to follow their favorite sport team and in contacting various AFL clubs, it became apparent that at least three different types of trips existed. These trips differed primarily based on how the trip was organized. These trips included: 1) organized packages offered by the club itself, 2) trips organized by supporter groups, where travel was one of the groups’ activities, and 3) trips organized by a group where travel was the sole activity of the group. The three types of trips also differed in the way in which the club was involved.

On further investigation of the components of the trips on offer, it became apparent that the trip elements included in each package differed, as did the frequency in which the trips were offered. The supporter groups traveled to all of the teams’ away games, whereas the organized package tours were mainly offered over long weekends. The most notable differences were that organized packages on offer included air travel, whereas the trips that were organized by the supporter groups all included bus/coach travel. The organized packages included accommodation at the destination, whereas many of the trips that were organized by the supporter groups did not – they involved arriving at the destination the day of the game, and departing the destination straight after the game had finished.

The following section provides a brief background of each case including the football club that was followed, the trip’s relationship to the club, the history of the actual travel group (where applicable), and data collection methods specific to each case study. The cases are presented in chronological order.

**Port Adelaide Power.** Port Adelaide Power became the second South Australian team to join the AFL competition in 1997. Since 1870, however, the Port Adelaide Football Club has had a team playing in the South Australian National Football League (SANFL), under the name Port Adelaide Magpies. When entering the AFL in 1997, the team was forced to adopt a different name as there was already a team playing in the league known as the Magpies (the Collingwood Magpies). In the SANFL, the Magpies had been relatively successful winning 34 premiership titles since 1870. Like its counterpart in the SANFL, Port Adelaide Power have also enjoyed reasonable on-field success. Port Adelaide only just missed making the finals series in their first year of competition (1997), made the finals series in 1999, and in 2001 became the first non-Victorian team to win the Ansett Cup (the preseason competition).

In 2000, as an additional service to its members, the Port Adelaide Football Club incorporated a travel agency – Power Travel – into its club services. The purpose of the travel agency is to service all of the club’s supporters, members, and sponsors, and act as coordinator of official supporter group travel to interstate matches. Power Travel is physically located inside the Port Adelaide Football Club’s clubhouse, and is also advertised on the club’s official website.
After seeing an advertisement for supporter group travel on the official website, I contacted Port Power Travel via email to find out more information about the trip, and to determine whether I would be able to participate on the trip. The trip was organised as an express trip for supporters to travel from Adelaide to Melbourne for the round two match against Essendon, which was scheduled as a Friday night game. This specific trip was termed an “express trip” as it involved travelling straight to the game, and straight back following the game, with no overnight stay at the destination.

The set itinerary for the “Supporter Express Coach” included bus departure from the clubhouse at 9 p.m. on the Thursday night before the Friday night game with approximately eleven hours of one-way travel time. On arrival in Melbourne, the group was scheduled to stop at the Victoria Markets in Melbourne to give participants an opportunity to freshen up (e.g., shower) and have breakfast. Four hours of free time was scheduled between breakfast and meeting at the Bell’s Hotel (the club’s official pub, which is owned by an individual with a strong association with the club). The bus was scheduled to depart from Bell’s Hotel to transport the group to the game. On completion of the game, the travel group was to head back to Bell’s Hotel before completing the eleven-hour bus trip back to Adelaide (scheduled to arrive in Adelaide before 8am on the Saturday morning after the game). The trip attracted 32 participants.

Neither the trip organiser nor the participants were informed of my research intentions. I simply explained that I was interested in learning about the AFL. While Spradley (1980) suggests that the aims of the research should be communicated appropriately to informants, he states that this process does not require full disclosure of the research topic. Therefore, this was seen as an acceptable method. As this was my first trip, I wanted to experience and observe the participants in a natural environment without influencing their behaviour. In booking the trip, however, I informed the organiser that I was from Queensland, and would therefore be travelling first to Adelaide for the trip. This information was disseminated to all participants.

I made first contact with the travel group at the team’s clubhouse an hour before the coach was due to depart for Melbourne. When I arrived at the clubhouse I initiated conversation with four trip members who were waiting with their luggage near the door of the clubhouse. The informal conversation lasted for an hour from which field notes were recorded. These participants introduced me to others during the trip. I did not attempt to act as a supporter of the team, but rather pleaded naivety to any knowledge of the team, or the game of Australian Rules Football. I explained that I followed (and was familiar with) a different form of football (rugby league), and expressed willingness and interest in learning more about the AFL. Consequently, the trip participants did not see me as a threat or a supporter of a rival team in the same league. Doing so encouraged participants to attempt to explain the key aspects of the game and the group to me. The key aspects that the group explained to me allowed me to get a greater understanding of the group, and what was
important to the group. In particular, the data spoke to the history and structure of the supporter group and the activities that the group undertakes the place of travelling to away games in the overall activities of supporter groups, and the justification behind the trip elements that are included in the trip.

Given the nature of the trip and the limited description of the exact research interests, I adopted the role of active participant (Spradley, 1980). In other words, I participated in the entire sport tourism experience with the group. However, as I was initially unaware of any of the rules that governed behaviour, I initially interacted only in a limited capacity. As my knowledge increased, I sought to emulate participants’ behaviour and take a more active role. That is, as I learnt more about the group, I attempted to adopt appropriate behaviours. For example, I purchased and wore a team shirt while in Melbourne, and was therefore more readily accepted by the group. This also enabled me to gain a better understanding and feeling of the experience, especially experiencing interaction with opposing team members at the game. I often exchanged my thoughts of the experience with other trip participants in order to validate my interpretation of the data.

I continually engaged in casual conversation with group members, and conducted a number of informal interviews. Interviews were not tape-recorded, as I had not disclosed full research intentions to group members. Instead, I recorded field notes and key points from interviews as often as possible. At the first stop that we made, I initiated conversation with a group member who participates on all trips. Two other trip participants joined our conversation. The conversation lasted approximately 15 minutes, from which field-notes were recorded. As the group dispersed at the destination I followed one informant who I had met at the previous stop, in which time I engaged in casual conversation. As key topics of interest arose, I probed further about the key motives and experiences of the group, and the travel experience. This informant was chosen as she was a regular trip participant, she knew most trip participants, and was willing to discuss all aspects of the trip. We met up with one other trip participant for breakfast, with whom I conducted an informal interview which lasted approximately 15 minutes. Field notes were recorded and expanded on completion of the trip to provide further detail for future analysis.

We met with seven members of the group at a hotel, which was the meeting place for the group to be transported to the game. I engaged in casual conversation with the entire group, which lasted for approximately an hour and a half. I probed the group about what they had done since arriving at the destination, and also what they were looking forward to. Field notes were recorded and expanded on completion of the trip to provide further detail. Data were coded and further analysed on completion of the trip. Key themes and categories were identified and then informed, in part, the data collection in the subsequent trips.
West Coast Eagles. The West Coast Eagles were the first Western Australian-based team to enter the league in 1987, and in 1992 became the first non-Victorian team to win the AFL premiership, which they won again in 1994. In an attempt to provide an additional service to its members, the management of the West Coast Eagles decided to add a travel agency to the club: West Coast Eagles Travel. The purpose of the travel agency is to offer packages to select interstate games, as well as to cater for other travel needs of club members and supporters. On seeing an advertisement for West Coast Eagles Travel on the club’s official website, which included a number of different packages for individuals to travel interstate to follow the team (all of which involved air travel from Western Australia to an eastern state), I contacted the club via telephone.

The first trip that was offered for the 2001 season was an “Easter Footy Fest.” The trip offered was a five-day package to Melbourne over the Easter weekend to watch the round three match against St Kilda at Colonial Stadium. The package included return economy airfares, four nights accommodation, return airport transfers, reserved seating and entry to three games (the Eagles game and two others), entry to the official post-match presentation, and a tour of the MCG. Given that I was based in Queensland, I negotiated a customised package that included all options of the trip with the air travel eliminated. Therefore I could stay at the same hotel as the travel group and participate in all activities. Given that those who are united by shared participation in an organised package (which include air travel) often travel as individuals or small pre-existing social groups and do not actually unite as a unitary group until at the destination itself, I met with these groups at the destination rather than travelling with them via plane.

I informed the trip organiser of my intention to research the travel group. This information was further disclosed to trip participants. The fact that I had a limited knowledge of the AFL (and by extension the West Coast Eagles) was readily divulged (and probably obvious) to all trip participants. I informed participants that their anonymity would be protected. I was more comfortable stating the purpose of the research, and therefore did so on each subsequent trip.

There were approximately ninety participants on this particular trip, consisting of many subgroups, and two individual travellers. The group only congregated in its entirety at the three matches and the MCG tour. Therefore, I observed the group as a whole during these activities, as well as examining two sub-groups in greater depth. I conducted audio-taped interviews with the trip organiser and three trip participants. The interviews took place in the hotel where participants were staying and lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes each. Additionally, un-taped interviews were conducted with three subgroups of participants, each lasting between 15 and 40 minutes. These interviews took place at various eating venues. Field notes were taken during these interviews. As the group dispersed at the destination I followed three subgroups, which loosely held together during the trip. I took field notes after each activity pertaining to both participant observations and casual conversations. I
completed more in-depth notes each evening when the group had dispersed to provide further detail. Each evening I identified the major themes and categories that had emerged throughout the day. The key themes that emerged during this trip were the group dynamics and how that affected the experience, key differences between the supporter group experience and the organized package experience (in particular, the motives for participating on the trip), the role of the trip organiser in influencing the experience, the inclusion of various functions and the way that they were viewed and interpreted. These key themes and categories then informed, in part, the data collection on the subsequent trips.

**Brisbane Lions.** The Brisbane Lions formed in 1996 as the result of a merger between the Brisbane Bears (Queensland based), and the Fitzroy Lions (Victoria based). To maintain a Queensland presence in the league, the merger resulted in the team being located in Brisbane. Since the merger, the Lions have had mixed on-field success making the finals in 1997, finishing last in 1998, and finishing fourth in 1999.

For the 2001 season, the Brisbane Lions Football Club offered a limited number of trip packages to selected Lions games. The trips were advertised via the club newsletter and at Lions home games. On seeing an advertisement in the club’s newsletter, I contacted the Brisbane Lions Football Club by telephone.

One of these trips took place in round four of the season for the game against the Western Bulldogs at Colonial Stadium, Melbourne. The trip included accommodation, game attendance, and entry to the official pre-game function held in a function room at Colonial Stadium overlooking the field. While transportation from the accommodation venue to the game (and back) was included, transportation to and from the destination was not. Therefore, transportation arrangements from Brisbane to Melbourne were left in the hands of trip participants. The trip attracted nine participants including myself. A representative of the club was also present to act as a tour guide.

The group as a whole met in the foyer of the hotel to be transported to the game. At this point, I informed all participants of my research intentions. I acted as a full participant and engaged in casual conversation throughout the experience. I conducted informal interviews before the game with three trip participants, as well as with the designated trip organiser. Field notes were taken after each interview which lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured and were used to identify key motives for participating in the trip and the experience they hoped to get from it. Field notes were taken for the participant observations, and casual conversations that occurred during the group activities: pre-game function, game, and an impromptu post-game gathering.

Through data analysis during and after this trip, the similarities between the motives and experiences of both organized package tours became evident, as did the formation of a group through activities used to foster socialising. Differences between the organised packages also became evident based primarily on the length of trip, number of participants, the organized activities, and the ability of the trip organiser in fostering impromptu social
activities. The role of the official functions, and interpretation and interest of the game were also key categories that emerged.

**Fremantle Dockers.** The Fremantle Dockers joined the AFL in 1995 as the second Western Australian-based team (behind the West Coast Eagles entrance in 1987). Fremantle is unable to boast a history of on-field success as they were yet to make a finals series at the time of this study. During the 2001 season, they won only two games, finishing at the bottom of the ladder. There is a strong rivalry between the Dockers and the West Coast Eagles, as they are the only two Western Australian-based teams and are based in close proximity to one another (with both sharing the same home game venue – Subiaco Oval).

While the Fremantle Football Club itself does not offer any official opportunities for individuals to travel to follow the team, one group has emerged that travels by coach to follow the team. The group, named the “Bus Trekkers,” travels annually by bus approximately thirty-six hours (each-way) across the Nullarbor to follow the team. After seeing an article in the club’s official online newsletter, the “Direct Line Newsletter,” I contacted the Fremantle Football Club by telephone and was given the contact details of the trip organiser. I then contacted the trip organiser by phone and informed her of the research purpose, and communicated my intentions to act as a full participant in the travel experience. The trip organiser communicated the details of the trip as well as updates of trip information to me by both fax and telephone.

For the 2001 season, the group (in its fifth year), travelled to the round seven match against the Adelaide Crows at Football Park, Adelaide. The trip consists of travel to and from the destination (with stops approximately every two hours) and two days at the destination. The trip attracted 22 participants of whom 15 were repeat trip participants. In order to acquaint myself with the trip organiser and trip participants before the trip began, I travelled to the home city of the group two days before the group was due to depart. I stayed in the home of the trip organiser for those two days, during which time I interviewed the trip organiser and her partner in-depth, both of whom had been on the trip a number of times. The interview was audio-taped and lasted 45 minutes. Staying in the home of the trip organiser allowed me to collect further information about the trip through informal conversations from which field notes were recorded.

During the days before the trip, the trip organiser took me to the football club to meet some of the trip participants, and to participate in volunteer activities at the club. The trip organiser introduced me to players, various club officials, and the volunteers who were at the club at the time (three of whom had been on previous trips). I conducted informal interviews with three volunteers who had been on the trip before, two of whom were going on the impending trip. Field notes were recorded during these interviews, which ranged between 15 and 30 minutes in length. These trip participants introduced me to others during the trip. Before the actual trip, I was able to code the data from the interactions and interviews with the group. Key themes and categories that emerged during this time included the history and
purpose of the group, the group composition, and folklore and rituals that the group undertakes from previous trips.

On arrival at the bus departure point, the trip organiser introduced me to all trip participants as a student who was conducting research into the behaviours of those who travel to follow professional sport teams. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the trip organiser and her partner were unable to take the trip. During the trip, I participated fully in all group activities. Field notes were recorded after each group activity. Interviews were conducted during the trip with 20 of the 22 participants, and with one of the two bus drivers. The interviews ranged between 20 and 40 minutes in length and were conducted primarily on the bus (as there was ample time), and during the longer trip stops.

Interviews were semi-structured and were used to identify key motives, experiences, and the norms and rituals of the group that travels to follow the team. Interview notes were taken. After each of the interviews, the questions were revised to further explore the key experiences and ideas described in previous interviews and therefore became more structured. The interviews were also audio-taped and subsequently transcribed to allow a more detailed analysis. During the trip, key themes that emerged were the purpose of the group, the foci of identification of the group, open group communication, the socialisation of newcomers into the group, the role of repeat trip participants, the transcendence of status barriers, group conversation, the role of the trip elements in the experience, and the place of the game experience in the overall trip. Key differences between this trip and previous trips were identified.

Geelong Cats. The Geelong Cats are the second oldest football club in Australia (formed in 1859). They are the only club in the league situated outside a major metropolitan city. Whilst enjoying mixed on-field success, Geelong has won six premierships, however the last premiership win was in 1963. The team was runner-up in the grand final in 1989, 1992, 1994, and 1995.

The Geelong Supporter Group, also known as the Geelong Cheersquad, organises trips to follow the team interstate for most interstate matches. I contacted the Geelong Supporter Group President after seeing a notice on the Geelong Football Club website about supporter group travel. For the round eighteen match in the 2001 season, the supporter group travelled by coach to the game against Port Adelaide at Football Park, Adelaide. The trip included one night’s accommodation, coach travel and game ticket. The group departed on Friday night and arrived home on Sunday night. I informed the President of my research intentions and expressed a desire to act as a full participant on the trip. On arriving at the departure point (the football club), by chance, I met and interviewed informally an individual who was going on the trip. This interview lasted approximately 40 minutes from which field-notes were taken. This individual introduced me to four other trip participants as they arrived at the club. I conducted an informal focus group that was audio-taped with these four trip participants before the bus departure. This focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes and
explored the key functions of the supporter group, the motives for travelling to follow the team, and the norms and rituals of the trip. These trip participants introduced me to other trip participants during the trip.

I informed all participants of my research intentions. During the trip I acted as a full participant and took field notes as time permitted. Along with the recording of casual conversation, interviews were conducted with six key informants on the return bus trip which were audio-taped and later transcribed. Each interview lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. Data were organised and coded on completion of this trip. Key themes that emerged and were reinforced included the role of the supporter group, the stated purpose of the group, and foci of identification of supporter groups, activities and rituals on the trip, group conversation, being the minority at the game, game seating, the banner experience, correspondence with the club, and reaction to the game and game outcome, and the role of the bus in the trip experience.

St Kilda Saints. As one of the VFL’s foundation clubs (in 1897), the St Kilda Saints have not seen a great deal of on-field success. In 1966 the club won its first and only premiership. In 2000 they finished on the bottom of the ladder.

On contacting the St Kilda Football Club to identify travel opportunities to follow the team, I was informed of the St Kilda Supporter Group and given the contact details of the supporter group President. Similar to the Geelong supporter group, the St Kilda supporter group organises trips to travel to the majority of the team’s interstate matches. I contacted the President by telephone and informed him of my research intentions. The supporter group had a trip organised for round twenty-one, the team’s last interstate match of the season.

During round twenty-one of the 2001 season, the supporter group travelled to Sydney to the game against the Sydney Swans at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG). The trip included coach transportation and one night’s accommodation. Game admittance was purchased separately at the venue. I informed the President of my interest in acting as a full participant on the trip. The President informed a number of the trip participants as to the purpose of the research.

Two days before the trip was to take place, the President contacted me and informed me of a possible cancellation, or at best a change in the itinerary of the trip. This was due to the trip not attracting sufficient numbers to make it financially viable. The day before the scheduled departure, the President contacted me again to inform me that the trip would go ahead, but the itinerary had changed and the trip would depart on the Saturday morning rather than the original Friday evening departure time. The purpose of this change was twofold. First, more people could come on the trip if the departure was delayed until Saturday morning, and second, the cost of the trip would be reduced. The trip attracted 23 participants. The reasoning behind the change in the itinerary proved a key source of information and helped to explain what was key and central to the group: supporting the team.
As I had scheduled transport arriving in Melbourne on the Friday for the original Friday night departure, the President offered accommodation at his residence for that night. During the time with the President and his wife, the Treasurer of the supporter group, I interviewed them both in-depth. The interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. I was also able to collect further information through casual conversation from which field notes were recorded. Due to work commitments, the President and Treasurer could not travel with the group on the trip, but instead flew to the destination (Sydney) and met up with the group at the game.

The President and the Treasurer accompanied me to the departure point and introduced me to various trip participants. During the trip, I acted as a full participant and conducted 7 interviews: 3 at the accommodation venue and 4 at the game venue (both before and after the game). The interviews were audio-taped and ranged between 15 and 40 minutes. The tapes were subsequently transcribed for further analysis. Throughout the trip, I took detailed field-notes from observations and casual conversations. Data gathered from this trip further reinforced the purpose of the supporter group and their reason for travelling to follow the team. Additionally reaction to the game outcome, the social experience, being the minority at the game, the game experience, the activities and ritual during the trip, and the role of the role of the trip elements in influencing the experience were all key themes that emerged.

**Data Analysis**

To aid the data analysis process, all transcripts and field notes were entered into the NUD*IST software package, used purely as a means of filing and indexing coded data, which were subsequently used to identify emergent themes. While data was entered into NUD*IST at the completion of each trip, data analysis was also performed during each trip (as outlined above). In other words, the coding of the data and identification of emergent themes was a continual process that occurred during each trip.

Data analysis was not a standalone procedure, but rather data were simultaneously gathered and analysed. Essentially, the data were coded through the processes of data reduction, selective sampling of the literature, and selected sampling of data (Stern, 1980). In other words, I utilised a dialectical process working between the data (as it was collected) and the literature. Initially, I coded the data into as many categories as possible at each stage of data collection. Data were not forced into codes, but rather codes emerged from the data. Procedures used to code the data were congruent with the tenets of grounded theory (Cresswell, 1998). Core categories were systematically derived from the data through the use of open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding was used to label each sentence and phrase into descriptive categories, which allowed me to compare and contrast opinions and incidences. Axial coding was then used to regroup and reorganize the initial open codes. The axial coding process was used to develop data trees which were representative of the relationships among the open codes. Selective coding was then used to identify the core or
major codes. From the initial codes, data reduction identified core variables and emergent themes. As categories and themes emerged, they were compared to existent literature pertaining to the specific categories and themes. As new data were collected it was used to check and expand previous categories, and was continuously compared to existing literature. A table summarising the final coding structure is included in Appendix B.

The following four chapters present the results of this investigation. Consistent with the tenets of grounded theory, the results are the product of an iterative process of constant comparison between data collected from the research setting and the existent literature. From analysis of the data it became apparent that the behaviours and experiences of those under study were centred around group behaviours. As such, group structure and group processes are used as the central nexus through which results are interpreted and presented.

Before we can fully understand the group processes that take part during a fan travel experience, it is first useful to understand the structure of the groups under study. Three distinct types of groups emerged through analysis of the data, each providing a distinctive sport tourism experience. Chapter four outlines these three types of groups, and details and compares the intertwined elements of group formation and group structure. Drawing from the social psychology literature on group structure, communication, and identity and identification, group communication patterns are described along with the primary point of identification that defines each group. All groups identified are in someway related to the football club. As such, the chapter begins by examining how sport clubs facilitate the existence and/or formation of the groups. The chapter includes discussion of the degree of formality in each group structure, the ways that structure influences integration and cohesion within the group, and communication patterns. The role that travel plays in the groups’ activities are discussed. Then, the primary point of identification for each group is examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relationships among group structure, communication patterns, and the points of identification. These elements form the structural foundation through which group processes are interpreted in subsequent chapters.

Chapter four describes the structure of the groups. Yet, to understand the experiences obtained on a trip it is also necessary to understand the structure and components of the travel as well. Chapter five outlines the characteristics of the trips utilised by each group type such as: mode of transport, temporal elements, choice of destination, and activities at the destination. This chapter describes the trip characteristics of each of the three types of travel groups, and explores why these characteristics were chosen, drawing on literature about tourism decision making, and consumer behaviour. The specific elements that each group type utilises are dependent upon the way in which the group is formed, the group structure, communication patterns, and the point of identification of each group. The reasons for choosing particular elements, therefore, provide further insight into what is important to the travel group. Consequently, various trip elements are more of a consideration for some groups than for others. Thus, it is important to understand the trip characteristics and how
they are influenced by the group structure, as all of these factors further mediate the types of experiences that are had.

A reciprocal relationship exists between group structure and trip characteristics. Just as group structure influences the choice of trip characteristics, trip characteristics can affect the structure of the group. This occurs through the process of socialisation during a trip. Chapter six considers the socialisation that occurs during the travel experience for each group. Drawing from the literature on group socialisation and consumer socialisation, the chapter details the ways in which each of the three group types evolve during the travel experience. Particular attention is paid to: the formation of ritual, folklore, and group norms through the socialisation process. Emphasis is given to the ways in which each groups’ structure, primary point of identification, and trip characteristics affect the socialisation that occurs.

As the groups under study are those who travel to follow a sport team, one would expect the game to be an important element of the travel experience. As such, chapter seven describes the game experience, and the relevance of the game to the overall trip experience. Chapter seven draws on the analysis of group structure, trip characteristics and socialisation to examine the place of the game itself in the overall group experience. While previous chapters have been concerned with in-group behaviours, this chapter considers how the presence of an out-group influences behaviour, as one is sure to come into contact with members of an out-group (i.e., fans of the home team) when entering a stadium at an away venue. Special emphasis is given to how the point of identification of the group affects reaction to game outcome. This chapter draws on existing knowledge of fan behaviour, social psychology, social identity theory, and theories of group processes.

The following four chapters present the results of this study, each covering in detail one of the major results categories: (1) group structure, (2) trip characteristics, (3) socialisation, and (4) game experience and reaction to game outcome. The results presented in each chapter are an epiphenomenon of those that follow. That is, each chapter relies on and draws upon the results presented in the preceding results chapters. This allows for a systematic analysis that clearly defines and explains key elements in understanding the behaviour and experiences of those that travel to follow sport teams.

Particular quotes and field-notes included in the following chapters are coded to ensure anonymity of respondents. Supporter groups will be represented by SG1, SG2, and SG3. The long-term travel group will be represented by LG1, and the temporary travel groups will be represented by TG1 and TG2. To protect the identity of respondents, the particular groups to which the codes correspond are not indicated.
CHAPTER FOUR

Group Structure

From an analysis of the data, three distinct types of travel groups emerged: (1) supporter groups, (2) temporary travel groups, and (3) long-term groups formed for the primary purpose of travel. Each group provides a distinct sport tourism experience. Clear differences between these groups emerged through the data analysis. Specifically, each type of travel group has its own unique formation process, group structure, social identity, motives and socialisation consequences. The purpose of this chapter is to examine and compare these three distinct types of groups that travel to follow sport teams. To begin to understand the differences between the groups it is first useful to examine the purpose and motivation of each group, as well as the way in which the groups were formed. The way in which these groups are formed, the purpose of the group, and the scope of activities that the group undertakes all significantly affect and are affected by group structure. It must be noted that group purpose is not necessarily synonymous with group motives. In other words, whilst a group may form for a particular purpose (e.g., travelling to follow a team), group motivation for participating on the trip may not be the same.

While there are also individuals and groups that travel independent of the club structure, all groups identified in this study are in some way related to the club structure. In order to understand the emergent group structures, it is first necessary to describe the different structures put in place by AFL clubs that encourage and/or facilitate travel opportunities and the formation of such groups. The following section outlines the three types of groups identified, and examines the ways that club structure relates to the formation of such groups.

Formation and Purpose of Travel Groups

A brief history of the AFL competition and the clubs within it is given in chapter three. However, it is useful to take a closer look at those aspects of the competition and clubs that facilitate the formation and purpose of the three types of groups.

Supporter Groups. Just as tradition plays a major role in many aspects of modern day sport, it also plays a part in the formation and purpose of groups that travel to follow sport teams. Perhaps, the most traditional fan/supporter group (in the AFL) is the official “Cheersquad,” now commonly known as the “Supporter group”. Cheersquad is the name that was traditionally given to a group of avid supporters of a club who literally get together and “cheer” their team on in as many ways as possible. The name “Cheersquad,” however, is not synonymous with the American term “cheerleader.” The constant misinterpretation of the term is one of the reasons why there has been a shift towards use of the name “Supporter group.” Consequently, these groups will be classified as “Supporter Groups” throughout.

Supporter groups are a common underpinning of many professional sporting leagues, clubs, and teams. Most AFL teams in southeast Australia have an official supporter group. These groups have traditionally been called “Cheersquads” (e.g., the Geelong Cheersquad, the St Kilda Cheersquad). While these supporter groups have been a large part of the tradition of
the clubs within the AFL, the majority of clubs (those in south-east Australia) entering the competition in the last ten years have also formed such groups.

Supporter groups generally require official (i.e., formalised) membership. Members devote a large amount of their discretionary time and income to following the team, and form a vital volunteer base for the club. The primary goal of these groups is to support the team (or club) in as many ways as possible regardless of the on-field success of the team. Supporter group activities include attending all home games and various away games (depending on location). At both home and away games, these groups are often designated a seating area behind the goal posts. This is done in part to aid in the television coverage of the event, as the cameras often turn to the supporter group sections of the stand to capture fan reactions to on-field events. In addition to game attendance, supporter groups attend official club/team functions, volunteer at the club as needed, and support the club/team in any way possible. By extension, the purpose of travelling to watch the team play for this type of group is “to support” the team. This is illustrated in the following comment:

I think it’s important that we go…. You have a handful of us go and [we] scream as loud as we can at the top of our voice to make sure that they know that we’re there…. That’s important to know that we go all that way to see the boys in person. (SG3, female)

For the most part, there is a close relationship between the group’s purpose for existence and the group’s travel motivation. That is, the purpose of “supporting one’s team” is identical to the group motivation for travel “supporting one’s team.” For these groups, travelling interstate to support their team (or club) at away games is just one of many activities that the group undertakes. For different clubs, supporter groups place different values on different activities. Consequently, for some supporter groups travelling to follow the team is one of the “core” activities of the group, while for others it is not. Further, individuals within supporter groups rank the group’s activities differently, often with some degree of congruency with the activities which they themselves take part in. Therefore, it is unlikely that all members of supporter groups travel interstate to support the team. Rather, certain group members under the auspices of the "Supporter Group" travel to follow the team. There is often a core group that attends all away games, and other members who attend whenever possible or feasible.

In summary, Supporter Groups are embedded within the history and tradition of AFL clubs, and often require official membership. As the name suggests, the purpose of supporter groups is to support the team in as many ways as possible. Travelling to follow the team at away games is but one group activity, with others including home game attendance, and volunteering at the football club.

In addition to the supporter groups that travel to away games there are also groups that form for the sole purpose of travel. Within the broader spectrum of groups that form for the purpose of travel, two distinct types of groups exist: temporary travel groups, and long
term travel groups. Temporary travel groups are groups that form for a single trip and disband on completion. Long term travel groups are groups that form for the purpose of travel to follow the team and then do so regularly (as a group) over a period of time. Temporary travel groups are often united by shared participation in an organised package designed to follow the team, often facilitated by a service offered by or through a club.

**Temporary Travel Groups.** Many AFL clubs now offer travel services to assist and encourage club members to travel to follow the team. There are various forms by which these travel services are provided. For example, some clubs contract out travel services to external agencies, while other clubs have travel agents physically located within the club, offering members and patrons various team-related travel opportunities. Some clubs offer full travel agent services as well, which cater for all travel needs, not just team travel (e.g., Port Power Travel; West Coast Eagles Travel). Not unlike teams in other professional sport leagues, some clubs offer team-related travel services as part of their membership services. For example, one club introduced a travel facility with the intention of providing an additional service to its members as can be seen in the following quotation from the manager of the travel service:

> The key indicator is to provide a service to the members, an additional service. So instead of just giving members the tickets and say go to the football, get the merchandise and a few functions – come away and watch us play. Get to know other members [in doing so] and all those sorts of things…. Providing an additional service to our members instead of tickets to the movies. (TG1, male)

The travel services offered generally include game packages which consist of transport, accommodation, and game ticket at minimum. Some packages include additional activities such as entry to a player function, and additional tours and activities at the destination. Separate trips can be created or tailored to the needs of individuals who wish to travel to follow the team. Traditionally, organised “finals packages” have dominated travel offerings. The heaviest concentration has been on "grand final" packages, but trips to the finals series have also been popular. There is now an increasing trend to integrate packages catering for regular season matches as well. Further, clubs that do not regularly provide travel services occasionally offer organised packages to specific games.

Through shared participation in an organised package, the temporary travel group is formed. The group is temporary in that it is formed through the basis of shared participation when the trip begins and then disbands once the trip is finished. The group is therefore bound together for just a short period of time – the length of their package tour. Consistent with research in tourism relating to organised and packaged tours (e.g., Gorman, 1979; Schmidt, 1979), by going through such intermediaries as a travel agent, many temporary (or ad hoc) travel groups are formed. This literature suggests that complete strangers, who participate on packaged tours, can form a group during the trip often facilitated by increased interaction.
within boundaries – the boundary being participation on the package tour. These groups are often together for too short a time to articulate group goals, however this depends on the specifics of the trips such as the length of the trip, and the activities the group participates in, which are discussed further in chapter five.

Unlike supporter groups, who travel to an away game in order to support the team, not everyone who participates on the same package tour has the same motive for participation. Given the nature of the trip and the fact that it is organised in some part through the football club, football is often part of individuals’ reasons for travelling. However, the degree of importance placed on the element of football in the trip differs from individual to individual. There are those who go solely for the football; for others, football plays only a minor role. The following quote illustrates that watching football can be but one small part of considering to participate:

Personally, I wouldn’t go just for an Eagles game. I mean this weekend [this trip] works out fine because I get three games of football plus there’s other things I want to do in Melbourne as well. So it’s an ulterior thing as much as the football. The football is an excuse, and it’s a way of meeting people that you’ve never met before. (TG1, female)

The above response is not unique; football for many participants was not the prime attraction for taking part on an organised tour. For some, the search for travel or a tourism experience was often considered more important than the football itself. As most AFL games are played in the major capital cities, destination appeal often plays a part in the decision to travel. Additionally, as most games are played on weekends (long weekends included) the trips are conveniently timed for short getaways or extended holidays. The previous statement was made by a participant on an Easter weekend trip to Melbourne.

In summary, temporary travel groups are formed through the basis of shared participation in an organised package tour provided by the club. Unlike supporter groups who travel as one of many group activities, temporary travel groups form during the travel experience and disband upon completion. The third type of group identified through the data analysis is in some respects a hybrid of the above-mentioned groups. While also organised for the purpose of travel (similar to the temporary group), these groups are of a more long-term nature (similar to the supporter group). That is, they travel as a group more than once, and continue to exist in some capacity after each trip ends.

Long-Term Groups for Travel Purposes. Unlike the supporter group where travelling interstate to follow the team is but one of the groups’ activities, travelling interstate to follow the team is the core activity of this type of group. Unlike the temporary travel group that disbands and ceases to exist on completion of a single trip, this group is maintained. This group continues to exist and to participate in subsequent trips, often doing so on a regular basis – monthly, biannually, or annually.
These groups are not necessarily a direct product of the club structure. Often, especially in the more remote clubs (i.e., those that are geographically separated from the rest of the majority of the league), regular services or opportunities to travel are not provided by the club structure (although this is fast changing). These groups can form due to a lack of such opportunities provided by the club. While groups may form due to a lack of opportunities provided by the club, the club may eventually become involved (by being approached by the group, or by taking an interest in the trip). Having the club involved in the trip can work to make the trip more “authentic,” in terms of supporting the team or club. For example, the “Fremantle Bus Trekkers” formed for the purpose of travelling interstate to follow the Fremantle Dockers, and have travelled annually for the past five years. Since the group’s inception, the club has provided merchandise to use as prizes for trip entertainment, and in some years has sent an official club representative (one of the club’s staff) on the trip to coordinate activities. Given the distance required to travel, these trips are often more expensive and time consuming than those of supporter groups. Therefore, the trips are likely to be run on an annual (or biannual) basis, rather than the more frequent trips of other types of groups.

While these groups may initially form for the sole purpose of travelling to follow the team, the group need not be limited (or restricted) to the one activity; however, the travel component is the primary activity for which the group exists. The group may initially form for the purpose of travel, and then expand the scope of activities of the group over time. However, having an increased number of activities is not necessary to maintain the group, as can be seen in the following field note:

The Bus Trekkers formed for the purpose of travelling interstate to follow the team. At one point the group became the “Away Game Club” and began meeting at a venue to watch all other away games that they didn’t travel to as a group. However, due to the closure of the venue where they gathered, the group ceased this activity, and have now gone back to just travelling as a group to the one game each year. (LG1, FN)

Group members need not have regular interaction with each other apart from on the trips to remain a group. This is illustrated in the following comment:

I think also you’re probably making friends here that you don’t necessarily have to see throughout the year. But you see again on the next trip and still pick up where you left off. It’s a different sort of friendship and a different sort of bonding. It’s not like your mate who you see every week.

It’s just a totally different experience. (LG1, male)

Notice that the above quote alludes to the fact that although the primary purpose of the group is to travel interstate to follow the team (annually), camaraderie and social interaction experienced through the trip is a key element of the trip. Not only was social interaction a key element of the trip but it also emerged as a prime motive for taking part on the trip.
While the primary purpose of these groups is to travel to follow the team, the purpose of the trip is not synonymous with the group motives, or for belonging to such a group. This is further exemplified in the following quotation, which emphasises the importance of the social experience in actual trip participation:

The trip here, it’s the melding. If we didn’t win and that’s all that we came for the trip would be hopeless. It would be useless because you’d want to come to a win every time. It’s just a reason to all get together and have 4 or 5 days together. It’s good. (LG1, male)

As can be seen from the quotations, for the long-term travel group there is immense importance placed on the group itself, and on the benefits of being part of a group. Consequences of this importance will be discussed in the subsequent sections that examine group structure, and group identification.

In summary, three distinct kinds of groups have been identified, each of which is facilitated in some way by the club structure. The club structure influences the formation and purpose of each group in a different way. Supporter groups are embedded in the history and tradition of AFL clubs. Travel is but one of many activities in which supporter groups participate in, with many group activities centring around home games, and other club activities involved in supporting the club/team. Temporary travel groups form on the basis of shared participation on an organised package tour specifically designed to follow the team. These packages are facilitated through the club by being offered by a travel agent that has a direct association with a club, or the club itself. On completion of the trip, the group disbands and ceases to exist. Unlike temporary travel groups that form for the purposes of following the team on one trip, long term travel groups travel on a repeat basis. These groups form for the purposes of travel, and may be facilitated by the club or emerge due to a lack of club offerings. As the formation and purpose of each group differs, the resultant structure of the groups also differs. In order to understand those who travel to follow professional sport teams, it is necessary to further describe the structure of each group.

Forsyth (1999) suggests that a group can be better understood by gaining an understanding of the group’s structure. The structure of the group acts as the framework within which group processes take place (Brown, 1988). In essence, structure provides a set of expectations through which behaviours are consistent, stable, repeated, and organised. Group structure is influenced by motivation of both the participants and the group, as well as by the environment, and the broader social context in which the group operates (Slater, 1966; Tajfel, 1982; Wheelan, 1994). The behaviour of a group and its members may become more predictable if there is an understanding of the pattern of stable relations among group members. In order to understand the behaviour and experiences of groups that travel to away games, it is therefore important to understand the structure of the groups that travel. From an analysis of the data, it became apparent that each type of group had its own unique structure, which in part was affected by the formation of each group. It is first important to understand
the structure of the group before attempting to interpret the group processes that take place during a trip. The following section examines the structure of the three groups identified.

**Group Structure**

The ways in which each type of group formed, and the history of interaction within the groups clearly influenced the structure of the three groups. A key aspect of group structure that all groups differed on was the roles that existed, and the degree of formality within each group. The degree of formality within the group clearly influenced the interaction, and the communication patterns of the group.

Supporter groups and long-term travel groups, which are in a sense permanent groups, as they are pre-existing groups that have interacted before the point of travel, have a readily identifiable structure. Temporary travel groups, however, lack this pre-existing structure given that they essentially begin as a loosely bound collective of individuals that unite for the purposes of travel and then disband. The only structure that exists in the temporary travel group before interaction is the formal role of the trip organiser who acts as the central, uniting conduit through which the trip is organised. This can be seen from the following field note:

> All trip participants arrived at the hotel and were standing in the lobby. Lots of little groups were evident, but there was no interaction among these groups. Everyone was waiting for the trip organiser, who was standing at the reservations desk, to sort out the room allocation and give further instruction as to the activities of the group (TG1, FN).

The trip organiser holds a central position of power in that he/she has the knowledge of the trip and the activities that take place. Unless there are individuals or subgroups that are repeat patrons of the same or similar service, it is unlikely that a group will begin with any set structure (e.g., norms, roles, rules or regulations) beyond the central role of the organiser. The norms and values of the wider society are often used to guide behaviour. A more definite structure however may develop within temporary travel groups during the course of a trip. This depends on factors such as the length of the trip and amount of interaction time the group shares.

Lack of previous socialisation among group members accompanied by limited time to socialise and interact on the trip limits time to develop a clear group structure. As a result, temporary travel groups may only have the chance to develop vague limits or boundaries that govern what is acceptable behaviour. The actual formation of a group structure during a trip however involves the process of socialisation, which in effect forms part of the travel experience. The process of socialisation that occurs during the trip will be discussed further in depth in chapter six.

As temporary travel groups unite for the first time at the destination, they are not likely to have a pre-existing structure. The only element of group structure that may exist is the formal relationship between the trip organiser and the trip participants, as the trip
organiser is the only person that all participants (or at least a representative of each subgroup that travels together) have contact with prior to the trip.

The pre-existing natures of both supporter groups and long-term travel groups have a more readily identifiable or stable structure. Supporter groups traditionally possess a formal structure, which consists of an Executive, which includes a President, Vice-President, Secretary, a Treasurer, and various other executive positions. The group has a clearly defined or well-articulated set of roles, and relationships. Specifically, group members are assigned specific roles and/or functions. Each role has a fixed relationship to each other role. Each role is governed by a set of rules and regulations that act as boundaries for group behaviour. When a role is vacated an existing member generally fills it through a nomination and election process. However, while the supporter group has its own structure, not all supporters of a club/team belong to the supporter group, therefore in addition to the structure of the actual supporter group there may also be a perceived structure (or hierarchy) of supporters for that particular team or club. For example, one supporter group member describes the progression of supporter roles as follows:

We’ve been barracking for the footy club for the best part of 25 years. We’ve only been involved at this level [committee members] for the last 3. I think it’s a natural progression – you barrack for the footy club, you’re out in the outer, you get some seats, and then you join the supporter group, you go on the committee and you do your bit…. In a couple of years time we’ll probably move on and give some young kids a go. (SG2, male)

Notice then, that the progression of roles begins from outside of the actual supporter group, and is then followed by progression into and through the supporter group. Like other groups and organisations the supporter group progression is from member, to committee member, and then eventually stepping down. Selection on the committee of supporter groups is carried out via a formal nomination and election process. The group is therefore a constantly evolving entity, however elements of the group remain consistent due to the formal structure and clearly defined set of roles, rules and regulations. Membership in the supporter group, and the transition described in becoming a board member of the supporter group is representative of a serious leisure career (Stebbins, 1993), or what Unruh (1979) describes as a social world. The supporter group essentially represents the core, or inner-circle of the supporter subculture. As described by Donnelly (1981), an achieved subculture can be described as a series of concentric circles based on lifestyle and resources. Similarly, Unruh (1979) posits that a social world is “an internally recognizable constellation of actors… [that has] coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants” (p. 115). The supporter group is representative of the core as the group showcases a high level of commitment to supporting the team, and considerable access to information about the team (given the groups official connection to the club).
In addition to the formal structure that is an integral part of supporter groups, the constant interaction among group members aids in the development of an informal structure within and underneath the executive. That is, as group members interact with one another, and become familiar with one another while undertaking various supporter group activities, informal roles and regulations develop. Within this informal structure each member develops his or her own set of relationships with other group members – often depending on the individuals within the group. For example, one respondent described the relationships she’d made with other supporter group members who travel this way:

Jean and Charlie have become my aunt and uncle. Pat is my auntie, there are a couple on here that has become my Perth mum and dad, because my real mum and dad weren’t on the trip to Perth, so they became my adopted parents…. I have so many family members. (SG2, female)

While personal relationships develop forming an informal group structure, when travelling to follow the team, other informal roles that develop are more organisational, including organising entertainment and raffles on the bus, and organising pre-game sweepstakes.

Supporter groups have a formal structure with specified roles and relationships. Due to the regularity of interaction among supporter group members not just through travelling to follow the team, but through other group activities, informal roles emerge underneath the formal structure. The supporter group essentially represents the core, or inner-circle of the supporter subculture. As described by Donnelly (1981), an achieved subculture can be described as a series of concentric circles based on lifestyle and resources. The supporter group is essentially at the core, or inner-concentric circle of the supporter subculture, with a high level of commitment to supporting the team, and considerable access to information about the team (given the groups official connection to the club).

The long-term travel group on the other hand does not have any formalised group structure. Rather, members of long-term groups, have roles that emerge as a result of interaction and experience rather than being set (or dictated) by constitution, such as impromptu trip leader, trip organiser, or entertainer. This is consistent with literature on group structure which suggests that groups without a formal structure are likely to develop an informal structure as roles emerge through members interacting with other group members (Forsyth, 1999). Within this informal structure each member develops his or her own set of distinct relationships with other group members.
While there is no set of explicit rules or regulations that govern these groups, an informal code of behaviour and group boundaries may exist. The following conversation illustrates this informal code of behaviour:

LG1a: You’d have to do something pretty terrible on this bus to be rejected…. We’ve got limits here. We’re all here for fun. No hanky panky, none of this, none of that.

LG1b: This is good actually because it’s not your normal footy trip. Not your rowdy, wild, dirty…

LG1a: That’s right most of the girls up the back here are here with their husbands at home. Our wives are at home – we’re all together. It’s just if someone went over that limit – it would be…. There’s unwritten rules.

Notice that the above conversation illustrates the informal regulations that govern the behaviour of the group. Formal and informal groups need not be mutually exclusive, nor do they need be stagnant and bound to any particular structure. For example, the above-mentioned group was considering the creation of a formally structured “Away Game Club” to assist in the organisation and coordination of the annual trip. Likewise, while a formal structure may govern the behaviour and beliefs of supporter groups, an informal structure can also emerge as illustrated above. Dissatisfaction with an existing group structure can act as a catalyst through which an informal structure emerges, and in some cases can act to overthrow the formal structure. For example, the researcher observed one scenario where there was dissatisfaction with the formal structure that governed a particular supporter group, thereby acting as a catalyst for an informal structure to emerge as can be seen in the following field note:

There was conflict between subgroups within the group and the club President, which lead to an informal group emerging under the formal system – a coup. Due to the conflict within the group, the President chose not to stand for the position at the next election. The President’s decision was based on preserving the group, a group that represented the club with which he had a strong sense of identification. The President put his support for the club/team before any personal conflict with the group, thus highlighting the strong identification that the President had with the team/club. (SG3, FN)

The actions of the President in this instance are consistent with literature pertaining to group norms that suggest that a person’s standing in a group will influence how closely the person follows (or adheres to) group norms (Brown, 1988). Specifically, the actions of the President illustrate that members who identify strongly with the group are likely to adhere to the norms (rules and regulations) inherent in the group structure. It is possible that the formal structure of the group will be resumed after the departure of the President. However, with modifications to the pre-existing rules and regulations, thus highlighting the fluid nature of group structure.
In summary, although all social groups have some degree of structure, permanent or pre-existing groups are more likely to have a more readily identifiable structure than temporary or ad hoc groups, due to the previous interaction of the pre-existing groups. Supporter groups and long-term travel groups both have definable structures, whereas the structure of the temporary travel group is more likely to emerge during the travel experience. The structures of each group vary in terms of level of formality. Supporter groups have a traditionally formal structure. However, given the frequent interaction between group members an informal structure often exists. Long-term travel groups have an informal structure. The formality of a group may be fluid in nature, and can therefore encompass both formal and informal elements. It would seem that it is the interaction and communication that takes place during group activities that affect and are effected by the group structure. The type of structure affects the level of integration and cohesion within the group (Lawson, 1965), which is a function of (as well as being affected by) group communication patterns. Further, roles, rules and regulations (norms) of the group often mediate communication patterns within the group. The following section details the different communication patterns inherent in each group.

Communication Patterns

Communication is an integral component of group structure and subsequently group experience (Brown, 1988; Wheelan, 1994). Communication networks are essentially the regular patterns of information exchange among group members (Forsyth, 1999). The level of formality within each group influenced the communication patterns of each group. While individual personalities affect the way that people communicate, the communication networks inherent within groups mediate the flow of communication. Other components of group structure such as roles, rules, and regulations accompanied by the different way groups are organised, ultimately affects the communication patterns that exist between group members. Similar to other elements of group structure, communication networks can either be deliberately set or emerge over time. Forsyth (1999) suggests that some groups formally adopt norms as their group’s rules, whereas other groups develop their norms gradually through the mutual influence that group members have on each other through interaction, and thereby lend structure to communication. The communication patterns of the three groups identified range in terms of centralisation, directed by the different norms and different roles (formal or informal) that individuals assume within the group. In a centralised communication pattern, those at the centre have access to more information than other members (Wheelan, 1994), whereas members of a group with a decentralised communication pattern operate on a more even par. The following section details the different communication patterns of the three groups identified.

The communication patterns differ greatly among the three groups identified, and are in part a function of how the groups are formed and organised. The formal hierarchical structure inherent in supporter groups necessitates a communication pattern that is centralised.
That is, the formal board structure including the President, and the Executive, act as the central nexus through which information is communicated. In most cases, it is the President’s contact details that are made available to any newcomers who are interested in taking part in supporter group activities, including interstate trips. The President is often the first point of contact for newcomers to the supporter group. Subsequently, it was the President of each supporter group that the researcher contacted to gain entry into each group. Communication is therefore centralised through and mediated by the formal structure of the group.

The informal structure that exists within supporter groups (which is an outcome of the regularity of interaction between group members) further mediates the communication pattern. In particular, the communication patterns of these groups become less centralised as social bonds are created and reinforced through interaction. As group members share regular interaction during each football season (as well as during the off-season), and over multiple seasons, the communication pattern may become relaxed and thus allow for free flowing communication among members. The information disseminated through formal channels generally relates to specifics about group activities, and the financial status of the group. For example, all information about travelling to interstate games is disseminated by the Executive both through word-of-mouth and through the club’s official newsletter. A member of the Executive, the Treasurer, also handles payment for the trip. The information communicated through the informal channels can range from information relating to the group per se to personal information. One participant described the development of informal communication resultant of frequent interaction and bonding this way:

…these are the same people I see every week at the club training. Some of them come on and off. You’d see them at banner…we usually get about 25-30 people on the banner on a good night, and sometimes we can go down to 20 people. But it’s basically the same people, the same families…. It’s the same people who we see all the time, and we see these people at the VFL matches, so we can often see them Friday, Saturday, Sunday in the footy season and it’s good. We’re like long-lost friends that always sit together…. (SG3, female)

The above quotation illustrates the positive experiences and friendships that emanate from regular contact, which cultivates a more open communication system. The communication system, however, is not one that is totally open. This is due in part to existing conflict between subgroups of the supporter group which was evident on each trip. The following field-note illustrates this point:

Once getting on the bus, and being introduced to everyone, it was obvious that there were distinct subgroups on the bus. I was told previously that there were some recent happenings within the group that had lead to conflict between a couple of the subgroups. While evident on the bus, the conflict became more apparent when we stopped along the way. There were various
groups that would distance themselves from others. This happened at every stop, and then also at the game. Some groups informed me of this conflict. Further, in some cases the vast age ranges of supporter group members who travel to follow the team produced distinct subgroups. (SG3, FN)

Regardless of any within group conflict, the formal structure and specific roles of the supporter group Executive act as an intermediary between sub-groups. However, while it is possible for the President and Executive to be involved in such conflict, as in the example above, this can be minimised by concern for the longevity and stability of the group. In the example above, the President of a particular supporter group was willing to step aside from his position for the interest of minimising within group conflict to keep the group intact. In this instance, the President saw relinquishing his position as a means of minimising any negative reflection that such conflict could have on the team or club, which they represent.

Figure 1 illustrates the communication pattern that is characteristic of supporter groups. It shows that the Executive acts as intermediary through which information is disseminated to subgroups and/or individuals within the group. Not all communication however is directed through the Executive, as subgroups within the group communicate with others, which is an outcome of the informal structure that has emerged.

![Communication pattern of supporter groups.](image)

In summary, the communication pattern of the supporter group is centralised through the formal structure of the Executive. The informal structure of the group, which exists alongside the Executive, acts to decentralise the communication to some degree as subgroups form relationships with each other through constant interaction in various supporter group activities.

A centralised communication pattern is evident in temporary travel groups as there is generally one central person or agency that organises the trip. The organiser is therefore the primary source of information through which all initial communication is channelled (whether the organiser be a travel agent or a club representative). Depending on the mode of transport
which is most often air transport, these groups unite for the first time at the destination, most often during organised activities which are included as part of the package (e.g., at the game, meals and tours) as can be seen in the following example:

All trip participants booked through the club’s travel service and all travelled by plane. Although most trip participants were on the same flight, some even sitting right next to each other, they were not readily identifiable to other trip participants. The only person who was identifiable to all trip participants was the trip organiser as everyone had booked their trip through him. The group in its entirety only congregated at the hotel in the foyer when arriving at the destination as they were waiting to hand out room keys, and at the activities included in the package: the game and an organised tour. (TG1, FN)

Often, the trip organiser or at least a representative of the club or travel agency will take part in the interstate trips to facilitate various trip activities, and thereby assume the role of group leader. While the travel group in its entirety is only temporary, the group itself is composed of a myriad of subgroups, as the majority of people who participate in this type of trip do not participate alone, but often do so with at least one other friend or relative. It is rare that an individual will participate in one of these trips without knowing someone else who is also going on the trip prior to the trip (whether it be family, friend, or acquaintance). The trip organiser then, as the central conduit, can have a large impact on the communication and interaction among the group who are unfamiliar with one another. In particular, the trip organiser may facilitate interaction among those who travel alone or in small groups, thereby opening new pathways for communication. For both of the trips of this nature that the researcher took part in this was the case. The manager of the West Coast Eagles Travel agency participated on the five-day trip to Melbourne and often organised impromptu activities to bring various subgroups together, thus introducing new communication channels. Specifically the manager attempted to arrange additional activities for those looking for something to do including impromptu dinners, and pub visits for all who were interested. Thus, offering further opportunities to meet, communicate and interact with other group members. This is illustrated in the following field-note:

On the first night, the trip organiser was telling everyone who was asking what to do that there were people meeting at a hotel at 6 p.m. to have drinks, and also a couple of people meeting before hand at a local pub at 5 p.m. He told everyone that they were welcome. We went to the pub and seven people turned up. We then moved onto the hotel, which was a block away where there were approximately 20 people waiting for the trip organiser to turn up. As the trip organiser was the only person that many of the trip participants (small groups and individuals) knew, most were waiting for him to direct the activities. During the course of these activities everyone was buying rounds of drinks, which helped break down barriers, and prompted conversation.
among participants. Conversation started to open up among the group that was there, generally on the topics of sport, state rivalries, and vocation. From there, the entire group of ninety was to meet at a football match (not the one with the team that the group travelled to see). Small bonds had already started to form between those at the hotel, and we all managed to sit together at the game. The trip organiser facilitated a group dinner on the second night, and continued to build networks between small groups. From there, the networks began to organise themselves. There were however many participants on the trip who were quite content to do their own thing and did not participate in any of the impromptu activities organised by the trip organiser. (TG1, FN)

It can be seen that the communication patterns among the group changed throughout the trip. Bonding between newly introduced group members can be fast and is facilitated by various means such as buying drinks or finding commonality such as support for the team or the destination where they reside. Through such ad hoc interactions, communication patterns became less centralised during the course of the trip as participants began relying on each other rather than the trip organiser for information and direction. While the communication between group members is often temporary and ceases to exist once the trip is over, post-trip communications can continue as a result of trip interaction. For example, since the trip the researcher has received numerous phone calls from trip participants, and has been invited to social gatherings with trip members.

The trip described above included five activities in which the entire group participated: attending three football games, participating in a tour of a stadium, and participating in a tour of a museum. However, the interaction between group members at these activities was often contained within sub-groups, whether they be pre-existing subgroups or emergent subgroups from the trip. It is not likely that participants in a large travel group of ninety would have a chance of interacting with each participant (or even meet each other) during a five-day trip. However, a smaller group of ten participants may be more likely to engage in open communication on a more personal level. This is consistent with the social psychology literature which suggests that group size can mediate communication patterns, as size has a large impact on the amount and quality of group communication (Baron, Kerr, & Miller, 1992; Napier & Gershenfeld, 1993).

The size of the group alone is not the only mediator of the communication patterns. The length of the trip, as well as the activities (both length and type) that the travel group engages in also influence communication patterns. For example, on a trip with ten participants, including the researcher, the tour guide (a representative of the club), and three pre-existing subgroups, one particular subgroup did not interact with any other trip participants. However, the time that the group had to interact was limited given the short duration of the trip and organised activities, which included only a pre-game dinner and the
game itself. Communication among the subgroups still occurred during the trip, and the majority of the group continued conversing at the hotel after the organised package was complete. This process of how the communication patterns changed during a trip is discussed further in terms of socialisation in chapter six.

The typical communication pattern of the temporary travel group can be found in Figure 2. Note that the trip organiser is central to all communication prior to and during the trip, however, pathways of communication also develop as a result of interaction during the trip – often facilitated by the organiser.

![Figure 2: Communication pattern of Temporary Travel Group.](image)

Trip participants on organised package tours generally only communicate with the trip organiser prior to the trip. As the trip organiser is privy to information about the trip, the communication pattern of the resultant temporary travel group centres around him/her. During the course of the trip however, communication channels can open up between trip participants. In many cases the trip organiser facilitates the opening up of communication channels.

Unlike the predominantly centralised communication patterns that describe the supporter groups and temporary travel groups, the communication pattern of the long-term travel group, is predominantly decentralised. Unlike temporary travel groups that are set and organised by a travel agent (or the club itself) – the participants of this type of group may have a direct effect on the organisation of the trip. That is, all group members are able to contribute suggestions and preferences, to tailor the proposed trip to the group as a whole. The actual organisation of the trip however is typified by a somewhat centralised system. One person assumes the task of booking transport, accommodation, and other trip activities. This coordinating role is designated through the informal structure of the group. This centralised method of coordinating the trip is utilised for ease of organisation, and is not to be confused with the overall group communication pattern. The centralised nature of the
organisation of the trip merely forms one aspect of the overall decentralised communication pattern of the group. In this instance, the person who coordinated the trip did not actually participate on the trip.

On the trip itself, interaction and communication among members is more equal and thus represents a decentralised communication system. This is evidenced in the following field-note:

There were various subgroups on the bus, however somehow they all melded into one. Even though at one point when I was taking photos of the group, a couple of the trip participants decided to aptly name a couple of the subgroups (e.g., the Bad Girls, the teetotaller, the Beer Drinkers), communication was open and free between all group members. Everyone spoke to everyone else with no obvious barriers. There was no conflict within the group whatsoever, which is somewhat odd given the arduous and testing nature of bus travel, and the amount of time that everyone spent together during the trip. (LG1, FN)

As can be seen from this field note, subgroups were evident within the overall group. However, the borders between them were permeable. That is, the distinction between groups did not at all hinder communication between subgroups, allowing all group members to interact with all others (as is illustrated in Figure 3):

![Figure 3: Communication pattern for long-term group for travel purposes.](image)

In this model all subgroups and/or individuals communicate with all others – including the organiser (which is represented by the coloured circle).

In some cases, interacting and communicating with other trip participants was given as an important motive for participating on the trip, which would essentially influence communication patterns. For example, the following member of a long term travel group put it this way:

You don’t come just to be with your own little group, you come to mix with all the others because that’s what makes it more exciting. (LG1, female)
Such sentiment is common among long-term travel group participants and contributes to the decentralised nature of the communication system. Others express contentment with the interaction that takes place across barriers such as age:

I think it’s because we get on so well together being different age groups. There’s oldies, and middle aged, and youngies, and all sorts because we all get on so well together and it just makes it a great trip. (LG1, female)

Notice, communication between group members forms an integral part of the group experience. Unlike the communication pattern of supporter groups, conflict was not evident in this open communication system. This is possibly due to the increased importance that the group places on social interaction.

In summary, the communication pattern of the long-term travel group is the most decentralised of the three groups. That is, communication between group members is open and on an even par, which is congruent with the informal structure of the group. The importance that group members place on social interaction may be one reason for this decentralised system. Looking at the point of group identification, that is, the object or activity through which the group feels a sense of belongingness to can find a related explanation of this. For example, if the point of identification is the actual travel group, rather than an activity through which the group unites, conflict is less likely, as the focus and concern of the group is with the group itself. The following section describes the different roles of identification in each of these three types of groups.

**Group Identification**

The following section is not concerned with the formation of an individual’s identity, but rather examines the point of identification of each group, and the different roles that points of identification play in the group travel experience. Through analysis of the data it became clear that the groups felt a sense of oneness or belongingness to different objects. Even though the groups identified above participated in the same activity, they all travelled to follow a sport team, they have been shown to have different methods of formation, different group structures, and different communication patterns. Similarly, the point or object to which the groups identify differs. An analysis of the point of identification can be used to further compare and contrast the various groups, and further understand the behaviours and experiences of each group as an outcome of group membership.
As its name suggests, the primary function and purpose of supporter groups is to support the team or club. The group is essentially bound by the common social identity of being supporters of a specific team or club. This is evident when examining the language used by group members during interviews and casual conversation where there is constant reference to the supporter group using the words “support” and “belonging.” For example “because we are [team] supporters” was a phrase consistently used by supporter group members to justify why they travel to follow the team, as well as why they participate in other group activities. One participant put it this way:

Basically because they are our team. We’re the Saints [a nick-name for the team], we’ve got to. They’re our boys. They need us here. If we didn’t [go to away games] then there wouldn’t be enough people at the away games to support them. (SG3, female)

Note the collective language used in the above quote. The quote demonstrates that support for the team is what the group represents, and what the group is bound by, indicating a particular belongingness with the team. In other words, the “we are supporters” mentality is a display of the identity of the group, with the point of identification being the common goal of supporting the team/club.

While supporting the team is the common focus that unites the group, a secondary point of identification also exists – to the group itself. This is illustrated by the previous example of the President who stood aside for the longevity of the group. As the supporter group requires official membership, members define themselves as belonging to the particular group. Further, through interaction in group activities social bonds are formed with other group members which allows the identification with the social group itself to become more salient. It is worth noting, however, that the point of identification is not necessarily with the travel group, but with the overall supporter group and by extension the supporter group that travels.

The group identification is first to the supporter group as a whole rather than being travel specific. This overall group identification acts as a catalyst through which the travel group is formed. The sense of oneness with the supporter group encourages members to adhere to norms, rituals, and participate in group activities, one of which is travel to follow the team. The structure of the supporter group as well as the structure of the travel group (as a subgroup of the supporter group) mediates the communication and interaction between group members.

In summary, the point of identification for supporter groups is around a specific goal, to support the team. Identification with the actual supporter group motivates behaviour to travel to follow the team. As members continuously interact though supporter group activities including group travel a secondary point of identification to the group itself emerges. While the primary point of identification of the supporter group is support for the team, the primary point of identification of the long-term travel group does not relate to the
The team is not the primary point of identification but rather a point of common interest which unites the group. One group member described her experience in the group this way:

The fact that we are all Dockers supporters brings us together. It gets the buzz too when you’re walking up the street with your Docker gear on. The comments you get when you actually talk to people and they give you a hard time – but it’s a talking point. (LG1, female)

While at face value it may seem that the point of identification for the long-term travel group is being a supporter, further examination of comments and the behaviours of the group suggest that this is not the case. Rather, through analysis of the data it became apparent that the point of identification for this group is the actual travel group itself. In this instance the team simply acts as a common element which first unites the group. Unlike the supporter group where the primary point of identification of the group relates to support for the team or club, the primary point of identification is with the actual travel group itself. Trip participants indicate that the trip is simply a means for uniting and interacting with the social group as can be seen in the following quotations:

The trip here it’s the melding. If we didn’t win and that’s all that we came for the trip would be hopeless. It would be useless because you’d want to come to a win every time. It’s just a reason to all get together and have four or five days together. It’s good. (LG1, male)

…for these few days you’re with a group of people who accept you at face value…. You’re not here for any other reason. (LG1, male)

The point of identification of the group is the actual social group, rather than “being a supporter” as is the case for the supporter group. The group simply uses common interest in the team to parade and celebrate the social group. In other words, the team is used as an outlet through which to showcase a common group identity. As the shared identification is with the social group itself, the group has an informal structure and a decentralised communication pattern, thus allowing all members to celebrate their social group. Some but not all group members had a secondary point of identification with the team, however this is not what motivated participation in the travel experience.

The temporary travel group does not have a shared point of identification at the beginning of the trip. Instead, the group consists of a collective of individuals with multiple and differing points of identification who band together for a limited period of time. Similar to the long-term travel group, this type of group is united by a common denominator, shared participation in an organised package. Given that the trip is organised through the football club it is likely (but not necessary) that some trip participants have an identification with the team, sport, or some related element. In other words, individuals who take part on such trips may in fact share a point of social reference they may all follow a particular team. As noted earlier, the football team is not necessarily the core identification. It is possible that shared
group identification may emerge during the duration of the trip. During the course of the trip, individuals can assume a sense of belongingness with the actual travel group. This can however be dependent upon the length and quality of interaction that trip participants have. Repeat participants who utilise this type of travel service may end up forming a common group identity.

For temporary travel groups, there is not necessarily a common point of identification that all members share prior to going on the trip. Rather, individuals are united by shared participation on a trip. Group structure exists only in a limited capacity prior to the initial point of contact when all of the individuals and subgroups come together. From shared communication during the trip, and the emergence of a group structure (albeit temporary), it is possible that a common point of identification may emerge, often with the travel group, or with the team. The group may form its own norms, values and rituals. The group may bind through communication, and through communication a group structure may evolve, and henceforth a group identity may develop. The distinction between the group that essentially travels to follow a particular team, and the outgroup, the fans at the game that support the home team may assist in the development of group identification.

It is not necessary that a group structure or shared group identification will develop. This is largely dependent on both the length of and the quality of interaction of trip participants. This in itself will be a product of the trip specifics, which is discussed in the following chapter.

In summary, each of the three types of travel groups identified are bound for different reasons and have differing points of identification. The supporter group is united by a common goal, whereas the temporary travel group, and the long-term travel group are united by a common denominator. For the supporter group “being a supporter” is that which the group identifies. For the long-term travel group it is in fact the actual social group itself, which acts as the dominant group identity. For the temporary travel group, it is likely that individual participants have their own sense of identification with some aspect of the team or club. However, this is not necessarily common for the whole group. Further, it is possible for a common point of identification to emerge over the course of the trip dependent on the length of the trip and the amount of interaction. These differing points of identification have a large impact on the group structure, as will be shown in the subsequent section which more closely examines the relationships between point of identification, group structure, and communication patterns.

The results suggest that identification with a team is neither necessary nor sufficient to describe the behaviours of those that follow a team. The current research on sport fans has examined identification with a particular team (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Madrigal, 1995; Underwood et al., 2001; Wann et al., 2001), a club (Van Leeuwen et al., 2002), or subculture (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Green & Chalip, 1998; Haggard & Williams, 1992; Wheaton, 2000). With the exception of the research into
identification with a subculture, research on the identification among sport fans has been largely quantitative in nature. Consequently, the researchers have presupposed the dimensions of identification. That is, each researcher determines whether fans identify with a team, club, or player, and then quantitatively measure the level of identification. By examining identification through qualitative means it is possible to garner dimensions that fans may identify with without the danger of presupposing points of identification.

The previous sections have demonstrated that the three distinct types of group: supporter groups, temporary travel groups, and long-term travel groups. These types of groups differ in terms of the ways in which they form (or are organised), group structure, communication patterns, and points of group identification. Each type has its own unique formation process, group structure, communication pattern, and point of identification, all of which influence and are influenced by the behaviours and experiences of the group members. While this chapter has described the structure of the group, it is important to understand how the various group structures influence trip experiences. It is likely that certain elements of the trip (e.g., the length of trip, mode of transport, destination, happenings on the trip) impact on (and are impacted by) these group processes. The following chapter identifies specific elements of the trip and how they are impacted by and impact upon the trip experience.
CHAPTER FIVE
Trip Elements

The three types of groups identified in the previous chapter had very different kinds of experiences. On further examination of the data it became apparent that the construction of the trips in which each type of group participates varies dramatically. It is therefore important to understand the trip elements that characterise each trip and the reasons why each element was chosen. This chapter examines the elements of each trip and the way each trip is constructed.

The composition of a trip involves a set of consumer choices on different trip elements. Common elements that characterise a travel experience include: destination, accommodation, activities at the destination, sightseeing, timing, and mode of transport. Not all elements are necessarily a consideration for each group as some elements are consequential to a choice of another element. In order to describe the elements that are included to follow a sport team, it is first necessary to outline the specific trip elements for each group.

Supporter Groups

Port Power Travel. In round three of the 2001 season, the Port Power Supporter group travelled on an express trip known as a “Supporter Express Coach” to Melbourne for a game against the Essendon Bombers. The trip was termed an “express trip” as it involved travelling to the game, and straight back following the game, with no overnight stay at the destination.

The set itinerary of the Supporter Express Coach included bus departure from the clubhouse at 9 p.m. on the Thursday night before the Friday night game with approximately eleven hours of one-way travel time. On arrival in Melbourne, the group was scheduled to stop near the Victoria Markets to give participants an opportunity to freshen up (e.g., shower) and have breakfast. Four hours of free time was scheduled between breakfast and meeting at the Bell’s Hotel (the club’s official pub, which is owned by an individual with a strong association with the club) for a drink.

During the four hours of free time the group dispersed and the subgroups participated in a variety of activities, which included: bathing at a local swimming facility, shopping, bowling, sitting at a pub, and meeting up with friends and relatives. Members of the group then met at Bell’s Hotel where the bus was scheduled to leave to transport trip participants to the game. At the game the group sat behind the goal posts in the designated supporter group area. The group arrived at the game just as the stadium was opening, so that those in the group who were involved in erecting the banner on the field had time to prepare.
On completion of the game, the travel group was scheduled to head back to Bell’s Hotel before completing the eleven-hour bus trip back to Adelaide. However, the group made a collective decision to drive straight back to Adelaide without stopping at the Hotel on the way. This decision was made in part because of a club function that was to be held in Adelaide the following morning, and in part because the team lost and the group felt that there was nothing to celebrate.

Geelong. The Geelong supporter group travelled by coach to see the round eighteen match of the 2001 season against Port Adelaide in Adelaide. The trip included return bus travel, one night’s accommodation at the destination, and a game ticket. The group departed on Friday night before the Saturday game, and arrived back in Geelong on Sunday night.

Given the number of participants on the trip two busses were used. At the destination the group was split into two different hotels, as the hotel where the group usually stays could not accommodate all participants. A hotel nearby (one street away) was used to house the remaining group members. Impromptu activities at the destination included walking down the main street of Adelaide (which was near both of the hotels), visiting shops, and the local betting agency to place bets on the game. Some group members watched another game of football on television in the hotel rooms which featured a team that had connections to the Geelong Football Club.

The group arrived at the game an hour before the gates opened. Arriving early gave the group time to prepare and erect the banner for display on the field before the game. The group members involved in the “Banner Crew” went to one side of the stadium and prepared the banner. The remaining members of the group went and sat in their seats. The group was seated in the designated supporter group area behind the goal posts for the game. On completion of the game the group attended the official team after game function, which was held at a function area across from the stadium. Team players and officials were present on completion of the function. The bus transported the group back to the hotels. On Sunday morning the group departed Adelaide. Various break and rest stops were made on the return trip, mostly at service stations.

St Kilda. During round twenty-one of the 2001 season, the St Kilda supporter group travelled to Sydney for the game against the Sydney Swans at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG). The trip included return bus transportation from Melbourne to Sydney, and accommodation at the destination. Game admission was purchased separately. The trip was initially scheduled to leave at midnight on the Friday night before the Sunday game, and return departing Sydney at 7 am on the Monday after the game, thus involving two nights accommodation. However, the trip was postponed to leave on the Saturday morning so as to reduce the cost of the trip so that more people could attend. This reduced the cost in two ways: it reduced the cost of the bus driver (as he gets paid by the hour), and it reduced the accommodation required at the destination to one night (from two). The trip included return bus transportation from Melbourne to Sydney departing at 7 am on the Saturday morning.
before the game, and one night’s accommodation. To further reduce costs the group stayed in a hotel on the outskirts of Sydney, which was considerably cheaper than the hotel at which the group normally stays which is in the centre of town.

While on the bus the group held various raffles, and watched videos. Numerous rest and food stops were made along the way, often at service stations. The group also made stops at places that are noted tourist attractions (e.g., The Dog on the Tucker Box). As the group usually travels at night, they usually don’t get to see these attractions.

The group arrived at the hotel at 7:40 p.m. on Saturday night. The group had dinner at the hotel and then dispersed to the hotel rooms. On Sunday morning the group met in the hotel restaurant for breakfast at 8 a.m., and then departed at 9:30 a.m. for the game. The gates of the stadium opened at 10:45 a.m. in preparation for the start of the game at 2:10 p.m.

Group members who flew to the destination instead of taking the bus met up with the rest of the group outside the stadium. Those involved in the banner making took the poles and equipment to one side of the stadium where they prepared the banner. They then erected the banner on the field. The group was seated in the official supporter group area to one side of the posts.

When the game ended the group made their way out to the bus. The bus immediately departed to return to Melbourne. Rest and food stops were made along the trip, most of which were the same places that the group stopped on the trip to the destination. The group watched videos on the way home. The group arrived home on Sunday night, unloaded the bus and dispersed.

Common Elements. Common to all supporter groups the primary mode of transport that supporter groups utilise is the bus. This is true for supporter groups that are located on the south-eastern seaboard and South Australia that travel to other games on the south-eastern seaboard and South Australia. The supporter groups do not usually run busses to games held in Queensland (except from Sydney), and Western Australia, given the distance and time associated with the journey.

Supporter groups typically utilise one of two types of trips: Express Trips and Regular Trips. The express trip consists of travel to the game, game attendance, and return travel straight after the game. There is no accommodation involved in these trips, and there is only a limited amount of time spent at the destination, thus limiting the cost of the trip, and the time spent away from home. The regular trip is more time consuming and more expensive. There is increased time spent at the destination, as well as accommodation at the destination (usually one overnight stay).

The organisation of supporter group trips is often dependent on the timing and location of the actual game, as well as considerations to enable as many of the supporter group members as possible to participate. The members of the supporter group essentially have collective control over the specific trip elements. For example, one group decided to return early to ensure that they could attend another club function on the following day.
Another group modified their trip to reduce the cost of the trip so that more supporter group members could attend. Some supporter group members who still cannot participate on the specific trip (for various reasons) may take an alternative method of transport to the destination and then meet with the rest of the group at the game or destination.

**Long-term Travel Groups**

**Fremantle.** During the 2001 AFL season, the Fremantle Bus Trekkers travelled from Fremantle to Adelaide (approximately 2670km) for the round seven game against the Adelaide Crows. The trip included return bus transportation from Fremantle to Adelaide, two nights accommodation at the destination and a game ticket. The trip was five days in length including approximately 36 hours of travel time each way and two days at the destination.

A coach touring company provided the bus transportation for the trip. The two drivers on the trip operate and own the bus used for the trip. During the bus trip the group played numerous trivia games, and held raffles for entertainment. Rest and food stops were made approximately every two hours. Some of the places at which the bus stopped had become part of the trip ritual. Before arriving at these stops (often well in advance) repeat trip participants would discuss the importance of the particular stops and the activities that they engage in at each stop.

The group stayed in a hotel in the centre of town, the same hotel at which the group had stayed on previous trips. At the hotel the group met with other supporters who had flown to Adelaide. After arriving at the destination, the group had time during which there were no organised activities. Some group members went sightseeing at various locations, while others went shopping in the centre of town. The group then met up at the hotel in order to go to the game. The bus transported the group to the game.

At the game, the group sat in the designated supporter group area behind the goal posts. After the game, the group met with supporters of the team who had travelled from Melbourne to watch the game at a venue across from the stadium. The group had a meal there, and then went back to the hotel where the group stayed in the foyer of the hotel and listened to music on a duke box and danced. The next morning the group attended the official players’ breakfast. All players were in attendance, as was the coach and key club media relations officers. The breakfast finished at 10:30 a.m. and the group walked back to the hotel to get ready to go on a bus tour.

Each year the Bus Trekkers had gone on a bus tour to Hahndorf, a quaint replication of a German village in the surrounds of Adelaide. The group usually spends the day there. However the bus driver had booked to pick up another tour group on the way. The tour was therefore modified to cater to the second group. The tour consisted of driving around Glenelg (a seaside town), visiting Hahndorf for just over an hour, and visiting a chocolate factory nearby to Hahndorf. The bus then dropped the other tour group off. The group then had an hour drive back to the hotel during which time most group members slept. Five minutes after arriving back at the hotel, the group met again in the foyer in order to go out for dinner. The
group went to a local restaurant for dinner where everyone sat around a large table. After dinner, the group went back to the hotel foyer and played songs on the jukebox.

The next morning, the group had breakfast in the hotel and then boarded the bus for the trip back to Fremantle. During the trip to Fremantle, the group continuously engaged in trivia competitions and quizzes. Just like the stops on the way to Adelaide, the stops made on the trip back had become a ritual for the group. Group members exchanged stories about the significance of each stop, making particular reference to their experiences from previous trips. On arriving back in Fremantle, most group members stayed around the arrival location for a while chatting to those who had come to pick up others.

All members of the long term travel group have the ability to influence trip elements. Similar to the supporter group, the design of the trip is to cater for as many group members as possible. Various group members who cannot comply with the trip elements (especially the mode of transport), often fly or drive to the destination and meet with the group at the destination. Since the group started making this trip, the elements of the trip have largely remained consistent. This is true for both the elements set in the itinerary and the informal activities that group members take part in during the trip.

**Temporary Travel Group Trips**

Temporary travel groups form as an outcome of shared participation in package deals offered by various club-related services, as explained in chapter three. Trip packages include elements such as air travel, accommodation at the destination, game ticket, and often a team/club related function at the destination. Some organised packages do not include a travel component, but allow the trip participants to organise their own travel to the destination. The packages vary in inclusions, length, cost, location, and timing. The following section describes the trip elements of two trips of this kind.

**West Coast Eagles.** During round three of the 2001 season, West Coast Eagles Travel offered a package to watch the team play the St Kilda Saints at Colonial Stadium in Melbourne. The trip was termed an “Easter Footy Fest,” as it offered a five-day package to Melbourne over the Easter long weekend. The package included return economy airfares from Perth to Melbourne, four nights accommodation at the destination, return airport transfers, reserved seating and entry to three AFL games (the Eagles game and two others), entry to the official post-match presentation for the Eagles game, and a tour of the MCG. The trip attracted ninety participants. On arriving at the destination the group proceeded to the hotel room where the trip organiser allocated everyone a room. The group as a whole met during the activities in the organised package, which included attendance at three football games, and a tour of the MCG. During the time that there was no organised group activity, the group dispersed into subgroups. The subgroups participated in activities of their choosing, including sightseeing, drinking at pubs, eating at restaurants, shopping, and visiting the local markets.
Brisbane Lions. During round four of the 2001 season, the Brisbane Lions Football Club offered a package for fans interested in travelling to watch the Lions play the Western Bulldogs at Colonial Stadium in Melbourne. The trip included entry to the official Brisbane Lions pre-game function held in a function room at Colonial Stadium, game attendance, optional accommodation at a local hotel, and return transfers to the game from the hotel. While return transportation from the accommodation venue to the game was included, transportation to and from the destination was not. Participants were therefore left to make their own transport arrangements to get to and from the destination. All participants flew to the destination arriving at different times. While some trip participants arrived at the destination just before the game, others arrived earlier in order to engage in other activities at the destination including shopping at the markets, and touring the MCG. Trip participants met for the first time in the foyer of the hotel where a representative of the football club greeted them. When everyone had arrived in the foyer, the group boarded a minibus that transported the group to the stadium. This trip took approximately five minutes. On arriving at the stadium, the group proceeded to the function room where the official club function was to be held. The function room had glass walls which overlooked the field. The function included pre-dinner drinks, a three-course dinner, and viewing the game. During the function, raffles were held, and key officials including the coach and ex-players addressed the attendees. After the game the group was transported back to the hotel. Participants all decided to have a few drinks in the hotel bar. Some participants then went out to nightclubs to experience Melbourne nightlife. Most participants had organised their return flights to Brisbane for the following morning.

Given the way that these trips are organised, participants do not necessarily have full control over all elements of the trip. Instead, individuals choose a package that best suits their needs. The travel services offer a variety of packages with predetermined trip elements from which the individual chooses the package that he/she would prefer (if any). In some cases, not all aspects of the trip are included in the packages that are offered. This provides participants with the opportunity to tailor various aspects of the trip to their needs. For example, the Brisbane Lions club offered packages to a game in Melbourne that included an accommodation and game package, but no transportation to the destination. As transportation to the destination was not included, participants could organise their own travel to the destination at a time of convenience. Further, as the temporary travel group is not in existence until the trip takes place, the group as a whole cannot affect any of the trip elements. However, the subgroups of friends and relatives that travel together can.
The above section has outlined the trip elements for each group. While each group participates in a trip that is a combination of different trip elements, it is useful to understand why these elements were used. Various trip elements are considered more important for some groups than for others. It is therefore important to understand which elements are key considerations for each group, and which elements are merely consequential to a choice of another element. The following section details the considerations that each group applies when deciding upon trip elements.

**Considerations in Trip Composition**

As described in the previous chapter, the supporter groups, long-term travel groups, and temporary travel groups each have differing points of identification. Through analysis of the data it became apparent that the differing points of identification influence the composition of trip elements. The following section describes the considerations that go into choosing specific trip elements including the influence of the points of identification.

**Supporter Groups.** Supporter groups travel to most (if not all) away games. The regularity of travel to attend away games shows continued support for the team, congruent with the primary goal of the supporter group. The primary mode of transport that supporter groups use to travel to games is the bus. Travel time on supporter group trips typically takes between 8 and 14 hours each way. At the time of this study, air travel was comparably priced to bus travel due to fierce competition among airlines. As air travel is a faster mode of transport, it became obvious that the travel mode choice of supporter groups was based on more than just time and cost. The following quote suggests why this might be the case:

> For these trips we’d probably still run a bus trip because you’ve got to get the banner there, get the poles there. Yeah, interstate you’ve got to put them all together. Then you’ve got a hotel, you’ve got to get to the ground, and you’ve got to get back from the ground. The bus drops you off here [at the game]; the bus picks you up from here [at the game]. You can put in more gear, you don’t know if it’s going to rain, if it’s going to be sunny – you can just whack everything in there. You’ve got to get to the airport, you park your car there. If it was the same cost you’d have to think about it, especially with my parents getting older, and it’s harder. You’d have to think about flying, but there’s still something about the bus. You feel as though you’ve achieved more. If you’ve actually got on an overnight bus and you’ve gone through all that pain you get there and you kind of think I’ve achieved something. (SG3, female)

The respondent has highlighted several considerations for travelling by bus. First, a function and responsibility of the supporter group is to make and display a banner on the field before the game through which the players run through on entering the field. The banner is large and is made out of crepe paper, and requires two large metal poles to be erected. The banner is often made the week prior to the game. Therefore, the supporter group must transport the
banner and the poles to the destination where the team is playing. The supporter group also uses assorted cheer paraphernalia such as floggers (large pom-poms on sticks), flags, and posters to show physical supporter for the team at the game. These materials are often heavy and require considerable room to transport. Members feel that they would be neglecting their duties to support the team if they did not display these materials at the game. The transportation of these materials is one consideration that contributes to the use of a bus as it would be difficult to transport these materials via plane. Travelling by bus enables the group to physically display support for the team at the game. This consideration is consistent with the group showcasing their primary point of identification, being a supporter of a team.

Second, the above quote illustrates further utility of going by bus in terms of convenience at the destination. Having the bus and the bus driver at the destination to transport the group to and from the hotel and the game is an added convenience. If the group were to fly, there would be an additional need to organise transfers to and from the airport, to and from the game, as well as the additional burden of transporting the banner and support paraphernalia. In many cases the bus driver is an integral part of the group, as most supporter groups use the same bus driver(s) during and across seasons. The bus driver can control tourism related elements of the trip by determining the route to and from the destination, the locations at which the bus stops, and the duration of the stops ultimately affecting the overall composition of trip elements.

The above respondent also suggests that enduring a night’s pain on a bus makes you feel like you’ve “achieved something.” This comment relates to enduring the rigours of bus travel given the length of the trip as well as the uncomfortable nature of sitting on a bus for extended periods of time. Supporter group members feel that they are demonstrating a deeper support for their team by enduring more including the discomforts of bus travel. Many of the trip participants acknowledge that the bus is a particularly uncomfortable mode of travel, even more so after a loss. However, the supporter groups still travel by bus.

When asked why the group prefers to travel by bus than by any other mode of transport, the utility of the space on the bus that allows interaction among members was a key consideration. One participant put it this way:

I wouldn’t like to go any other way except on the cheersquad bus. The friendships you made, it’s more of a chance to catch up with everybody. You see some of these people at the matches, but most of us who go to the football don’t talk through the match…. So it’s a good opportunity to chat if you’re sitting with them on the bus, or just walk up and have a chat. I think the football part is the most important because you’re here to support the boys, and then from there it’s just the best way to come on the cheersquad bus…. I would consider flying to the places that the cheersquad busses don’t go. I don’t think I would consider flying if the cheersquad bus is going. But I would consider flying to Brisbane or Perth [from Melbourne]. But then I
would also go with cheersquad friends because if we do go by plane, we rent a unit, a house or something for a few days or a week, depending. (SG3, female)

The respondent suggests that the bus is the best mode of travel through which the group can travel to “support the boys.” Notice, the social group itself, the secondary point of identification of the supporter group also factors in the travel mode choice. In particular, being able to spend time with group members on the bus is viewed as important. This demonstrates that the salient points of identification of the supporter group influence travel mode choice. Bus travel allows group members to transport supporter materials to the game, and also allows the group to spend time with group members. The role that the group itself plays in the travel mode choice was further evidenced when group members explained the choice between air transport and travelling by bus. One respondent put it this way: “No [I wouldn’t prefer flying]. I’d still prefer to go by bus because of the people on the bus. It’s the company. It’s more fun if you’re travelling with people” (Jenny, Geelong). Another said, “I would still go by bus. I think it’s just the people you’re with. They’re a good bunch of people and you have a bit of fun. We know the people pretty well and they know us over the three-year period. And yeah it’s great” (John, Geelong). The immediate response of some participants was to first explain the benefits of flying, indicate that flying would be the preferred transport method, but then retract and explain that they would be missing something from the experience if they did not travel by bus:

Flying is great because you’re not as tired, and it’s more expensive, you normally do that on your own or with your partner. Obviously going by coach it’s a longer trip but you have more fun as we’ve said. There’s a group of 30 of youse [Australian slang for the collective noun you], and you are one. And we just have fun on there and with the raffles and the videos and just things like that, it’s…. Give us flying if we had all the money, we’d definitely fly…. But you don’t get that bonding I suppose that you can experience with a group of people. (SG3, male)

Even some of the most dedicated group members suggest that if they had the money they would definitely fly all the time. However, along with this they claim that given that the rest of the group could not afford to fly (e.g., pensioners, students, and low income earners), they would rather endure the long bus trips and travel as a group than fly alone.

The travel mode choice of the supporter group is inconsistent with current studies of travel mode choice, which have predominantly focused on the trade-off between time and cost, in particular, the value of travel time savings – VTTS (Barff, Mackay, & Olshtavsky, 1982; McGillvray, 1970; Quarmby, 1967). The research on VTTS suggests that an individual would trade off an increase in travel time for a decrease in financial cost, or a decrease in travel time at an increased financial cost. This is not the case for supporter groups that travel by bus, as bus travel has substantially greater travel time than travelling by plane at a
comparable cost. For example, the cost of one trip travelling by bus was $260 with 12 hours of travel time each way, when airfares between the departure city and the destination could have been purchased for $210, with just over an hour and a half travel time each way. In this case, travelling by plane would’ve provided both a travel time and cost saving. This disparity may be related to the focus of traditional studies of travel mode choice, which have been primarily concerned with informing transport planning decisions rather than the travel behaviour of tourists. Most of these studies have addressed the lost value of travel time as a function of the wage rate of the traveller on their journey to work (Henscher & Louviere, 1979; McGillvray, 1970; Quarmby, 1967). Other researchers have identified variations in the VTTS by using an individual’s willingness to pay to reduce travel time (e.g., Dalvi & Lee, 1971; Lee & Dalvi, 1969). Clearly for supporter groups the travel mode choice is not an outcome of this trade off as comparably priced airfares were available at a considerable time saving.

Barff et al. (1982) suggest that individuals use different rationales to evaluate their travel mode choice depending on the type of trip that they are contemplating (e.g., work versus leisure activities). Other research has categorised travel time as lost leisure time which could be utilised in a more productive way (e.g., Evans, 1972; Johnson, 1969; Oort, 1969). Similarly, Bokstael, Strand, and Hanemann (1987) suggest that the act of travel does not have a positive utility. Instead, it is a common postulate that travel time is simply a production cost, a necessary component that enables individuals to spend time at a destination. Truong and Henscher (1985) suggest travel time is an opportunity cost that can be transferred (or traded off) to other activities at the destination. Clearly for supporter groups travel time has considerable positive utility. Travelling in a group and the associated group experience add positive value to travel time. As supporter groups perceive travel time as having positive utility, group members are not concerned with minimising travel time. Walsh, Sanders, and McKean (1990) suggest that travel time “can be a benefit or a cost, depending on the distance travelled, quality of scenery, opportunity cost of time, and the like” (p. 20). This quote references pleasure driving and sightseeing by car on scenic highways in the Rocky Mountains. Given that supporter groups predominantly travel during night hours and pass through long open highways that have limited scenic appeal, this time would not typically be classified as sightseeing.

Perceived comfort and convenience have also been considered influences of travel mode choice (Barff et al., 1982; Cherlow, 1981; Nicoladis, 1975). Nicolaidis (1975) found that perceived comfort correlated highly with desired mode choice. Similarly, Cherlow (1981) suggests that relative comfort and convenience, and any inconvenience of transport timetabling, influence the mode decision. The behaviour of the supporter group is inconsistent with these findings as participants on supporter group trips note the discomfort involved with travelling by bus yet continue to travel by bus. As expressed by supporter group members, the interaction between the group on the bus helps to alleviate the discomfort
afforded by the transport choice. Additionally, the discomfort is used as a point of distinction which is thought to symbolise a deeper support for the team.

The versatility of the mode of transport is a key consideration of the supporter group in choosing to travel by bus. The bus enables the group to display its identity at the destination, supporting the team, and perform related functions such as a physical display of support. Further, having the bus at the destination allows the group to travel as a group wherever they need to go (including to the game), and transport any luggage or group equipment associated with the functioning of the group around the destination.

Traditional considerations of travel mode choice have not typically focused on group behaviour, but rather have focused on individual choice. The role of the group in choosing a mode of travel has not been considered. For supporter groups, the group itself plays a central role in the travel mode choice, as does the utility of the bus in enabling the group to showcase support for the team. In particular, the points of identification of the supporter group to support the team and the group itself are key motivators in travel mode choice. These factors help to explain the many inconsistencies between the current literature and the behaviour of those under study in this research.

While the mode of transport of the supporter group is predetermined, other trip elements are contingent on the timing of the game, and the ability to cater for as many group members as possible. Supporter groups have two types of trips that they use depending on the timing of the game: Express Trips, and Regular Trips. Express trips are used for games that are close to either end of the weekend (i.e., Friday night, or Sunday afternoon), as they minimise the time spent away from home. This is to cater for participants who work Monday to Friday, and have limited discretionary time available. The express trips are also cheaper as they do not include accommodation at the destination. Supporter groups have collective control over the trip elements so the group can adapt elements of the trip to cater for the majority of members. As illustrated in the trip descriptions above, groups can reduce the cost of the trip by eliminating the need for accommodation at the destination through reducing the length of the trip. Supporter group members who cannot participate on the trip may choose alternate arrangements including an alternate method of transport (e.g., fly or drive) and then meet with the group at the game or destination. This is an accepted practice for supporter group members.

Traditional destination attributes are not typically a major consideration in deciding to take part on express trips as limited time is spent at the destination (usually only a couple of hours before and/or after the game). For the regular trips, there is at least one overnight stay at the destination. It follows, then, that destination features or attributes may be a greater consideration for these trips. For both types of trips, however, the main focus of the group is supporting the team and therefore the attributes of the destination pale into insignificance.
The dictation of the fixture by the league limits the destinations at which games are played, and by extension limits the destinations to which it is possible to travel to follow one’s favourite team. Supporter groups on the south-eastern seaboard and South Australia travel to all away games on the south-eastern seaboard and in South Australia. For these trips, destination in itself is not a consideration. Supporter group members differentiate between the trips that the busses travel to and the trips that no bus runs to. However, they do not differentiate between the destinations to which the bus travels. Destination attributes become more of a consideration when supporter group members travel to follow games outside of this vicinity.

As supporter group busses do not travel to Brisbane or Perth, supporter groups view these destinations differently than destinations to which the bus travels. Given that there is no supporter group bus that travels to these destinations there is often a novelty effect associated with them. Further, the extended distance that group members need to travel and the fact that they have to organise the trip themselves cause Brisbane and Perth to be seen as key holiday destinations. Brisbane and by extension, the Gold Coast (a resort city located approximately 75km south of Brisbane) are seen as the prime holiday destination because the theme parks, holiday atmosphere, and the beaches of the Gold Coast are prime attractions. Perth is also seen as a holiday destination. However it is perceived to be more expensive and time consuming to travel to Perth as it is the most distant destination for any supporter group in Eastern Australia. Some supporter group members place special emphasis on attending these games as they believe that if they do not go to the away games the team would not receive adequate support at them, as is illustrated in the following quotation:

I think it’s more important that we go to Perth. You have a handful of us go, and most of the years it will be just the four of us that go, and we scream as loud as we can at the top of our voice to make sure that they [the players] knew that we were there, and that we came here to win. That’s important to know, that we go all that way to see our boys in person. In that respect it’s important. (SG3, female)

Notice, the emphasis placed on the primary point of identification of the supporter group, support of the team. Given that Perth is the most distant destination where any team travels to play (with the exception of the two Perth based teams), the number of supporters who travel to watch the team is less than for other trips. This acts as an added incentive for some supporter group members to travel to Perth to make sure the team has some support at the destination. Further, the appeal of being part of the minority at the game is viewed as a unique and desirable experience. This is especially true for some supporter group members who attempt to use this experience to differentiate themselves from supporters who do not travel to these games.
While traditional destination attributes rarely come into play for trips that the bus travels to, various aspects relating to the particular game at the destination may feature in the decision to travel to a particular destination. Preferences for destinations then are not necessarily related to attributes that one would traditionally categorise as destination attributes, but to aspects relating to some aspect of the game being played at the destination. For example, state rivalries were a motive for travelling to a destination:

As for hatred rivalry which I enjoy is Adelaide, because they’re a football state and they hate Victorians as we hate South Australians but when you go to Football Park there’s 40000-45000 and there’s only 50 of us, so it’s 100 to 1 outnumbered or whatever. (SG3, male)

The rivalry noted here is not directed at one particular team, but more at a destination (or state). State rivalries are largely a bi-product of the State of Origin competition in which different states compete against each other. In some instances, the reputation of the supporters of an opposing team, as an extension of a rivalry, can act as a deterrent from travelling to a particular destination. The following quotation illustrates this point:

I haven’t gone to Adelaide because the supporters over there are just so horrible that you just wouldn’t go there. I saw on TV today a commercial on TV, with the Port Adelaide and the Adelaide Players saying to their supporters don’t swear, don’t do this, there are children. So I won’t go there because it’s just so horrible. (SG2, female)

The above quote illustrates a common perception about Adelaide supporters held by other teams in the league. However, I travelled with a group of these so called ill-behaved supporters, and attended games against the teams and witnessed no such behaviours. Regardless, the reputation of these supporters extends nationally and acts as a deterrent to some, and an attraction to others. Many of the supporters making these statements had not actually been to an away game in Adelaide, but had heard about them through friends and the media, thus highlighting the effect of word of mouth and media coverage in influencing one’s perceptions of supporters of other teams, and by extension destination choice. This is consistent with work in tourism that suggests that media and social group influence perceptions of a destination that individuals have not been to (Um & Crompton, 1992), and that the advertising and media coverage of sport events can generate indirect tourism to a destination (cf., Chalip, et al., 2003; Getz & Fairley, 2004).

For most supporter group trips one bus is usually sufficient to cater for all group members who participate. However, there are occasions where more than one bus is needed to cater for the number of participants; this is especially true around finals time. For example, one of the teams in the 2001 final had seven busses of fans travel interstate to see the final.
This example illustrates that if a team is successful (or performing well on-field), then more supporter group members will travel to follow their team. This is further highlighted in the following response:

Most interstate trips it’s the one bus. In years gone by we always had two big busses. Numbers have dropped off, there’s the cost factor, depending on the time of year, and how many trips they’ve got people. Some people prefer to go to some games or states than others. If the team’s travelling well, you’ve got no problems filling the bus. If things aren’t travelling well, sometimes you can struggle to fill the bus – some people get fickle, very fickle and fed up with it all [if the team is losing]. (SG2, female)

Notice that cost, time of year, and number of trips are also identified as elements that affect the number of people on each trip and the number of busses required. Gibson et al. (2003) suggest that the success of a team may be linked to fans attending more away games. It would seem that team success is a better predictor of the volume of fans who travel to a game, rather than the frequency of travel. There is a core of supporters who travel to away games throughout the season regardless of the on-field success of the team. When the team is successful there is often an increase in the number of sporadic supporters of the team, evidenced in an increase in numbers of people who travel to interstate games. This is consistent with other research which has suggested that fans are more likely to associate themselves with a team after a win (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976).

For many supporter group members, being a supporter group member is one of the most salient aspects of their identity (i.e., supporting the team is one of the most important points in how they define themselves). As a result, these members devote a large amount of their discretionary time and income to supporter group activities, including travelling to follow the team at away games. Given that most of the AFL games are scheduled on a Friday night or during the weekend, except for those that are held on public holidays, supporter group members who work a traditional working week (Monday to Friday) have available discretionary time (weekends) to travel to most games. However, due to the lengthy bus travel involved in supporter group trips, travel time may sometimes impinge on either Friday or Monday work hours (for Friday night and Sunday games respectively). It is a common practice for supporter group members to have arrangements with their employers such that they can take a day off either side of a weekend when there is an away game, and count that time against their annual holiday block. Similarly, those who are self-employed adjust their work hours to suit the travel arrangements of the supporter group.
For others with less flexible work hours, claiming sick days is a plausible option. One particularly illustrative example of this behaviour is demonstrated in the following field note:

One lady decided to come on the trip at the last minute – literally half an hour before the bus was to leave. She was at the club, the bus departure point, as the group was congregating for departure. She was on a three-month trial period at a new job and decided that she wanted to go on the trip. She was supposed to work on the Saturday, the day of the game, so she got her mother to call in sick for her to avoid any repercussions of asking for the day off especially while she was on a trial period. In addition to calling in sick and risking her job, she was three weeks behind in paying her rent, and borrowed money from her mother to go on the trip…. During the trip she was saying that she couldn’t believe that she was on the trip…. While at the game she had the opportunity to hold the banner up before the game in the middle of the field. As the banner usually gets filmed and screened on TV as part of the game coverage, she was a bit wary of being seen by her boss. However, the opportunity to go out on the field and hold up the banner was enough of an experience for her to say that if she got fired that it would be worth it. (SG1, FN)

The above examples illustrate that supporter groups include members who are willing to arrange (or rearrange) their non-discretionary time and income, so as to maximise the opportunity to travel to follow the team. While creatively overcoming time constraints, this also illustrates how certain individuals overcome or ignore financial constraints in order to participate on these trips. Many of the supporter group travel participants included low-income earners, pensioners, and welfare recipients. These market segments are considered a low-yield market of infrequent leisure travellers. Interestingly, these are markets that are not typically recognised by tourism marketers as potential tourism consumers as they are seen to have limited financial means with which to participate in tourism activities.

In summary, the composition of trip elements used on supporter group trips are based around supporting the team and the social group itself. The elements of the trip are chosen to allow the group to display support for the team at the destination and at the game by showing physical support for the team at the game, and to enable the group to interact during the trip.

Long-term Travel Group. The travel element that is of most concern to the long-term travel group is that of travel mode. The mode of transport utilised by the long-term travel group is the bus. The bus trip that the long-term travel group takes involves 36 hours of travel each way. The central role that the bus holds in the trip is highlighted by the group being self-named the “Bus Trekkers.” Travelling by bus then is the focal activity which legitimises the group.
While travelling by bus is neither the most comfortable or rapid travel mode, the long-term travel group derives utility from the bus through its ability to provide a common space for group members to freely interact. Several respondents emphasised the importance of group interaction when asked why they travelled by bus:

LG1a: For the agony and the ecstasy.
LG1b: Yeah, that’s about it…and the interaction I think – everybody on the bus.
LG1a: The worst time is probably a couple of times at 2 or 3o’clock in the morning on the bus.
LG1b: It’s like having a baby. You soon forget all the pain.
LG1a: As soon as you stop and have a 10-minute break…
LG1b: One time during the night is always a pain time, but you get past that. Had the baby, gone on.

Notice that the group interaction among members alleviates negative aspects associated with bus travel. Another respondent further emphasised the role of the group in the travel mode choice:

That’s why you do it [travel by bus]. The simple reason, in a group you can have fun doing it and it doesn’t hurt as much. If you did it [travelled] on your own you’d probably think twice and never do it. (LG1, male)

Another respondent described the benefits of travelling by bus by comparing bus travel to travel by plane:

[On the bus] you’ve got time to enjoy yourself to get over there and you’ll have fun coming back. And if you’re on a plane you’ve got to sit still and behave because you’ve got other people to think about. Whereas if you’re on the bus with all your mates and that, you can do what you want and say what you want. (LG1, female)

As this quote illustrates, the bus is a medium that allows the group to interact, and enjoy a space that is insulated from the outside world. An experience that is not available through plane travel. Having a space that is unique to the group allows participants to exert more control over their own experience without having to cater for the presence of non-group members. While the group has the bus to itself, the group is able to use the space freely to provide and enjoy entertainment of their choosing including trivia games, karaoke, joke telling, and various other activities, all of which foster interaction between members. The importance of the social group itself, and interaction within the group is key in choosing the travel mode. This is consistent with the strong emphasis that the long-term travel group places on the social group and the importance of camaraderie which are an outcome of the primary point of identification of the long-term travel group, the group itself. Thus, travelling by bus affords the group a common space where group members can freely interact and enjoy the benefits of camaraderie being insulated from the outside world.
While the bus is the primary travel mode choice of the group, some long-term travel group members choose to take an alternate method of transport (e.g., fly or drive) and then join the rest of the group at the game or destination. This is an accepted practice for supporter groups, but the long-term travel group does not readily accept those that do not travel on the bus, as illustrated in the following quotation:

[We go by bus] because that’s how it started – going by bus, the camaraderie of going by bus. I know to some extent there was friction by going by plane and some going by bus. I thought I wouldn’t meet any of these people if I didn’t go by bus. People who fly don’t sit near each other. We don’t go to the same functions [as the people who fly]. (LG1, female)

The previous year, the fact that a few group members chose to fly rather than to go by bus had caused friction within the group. Travelling with the group on the bus is clearly a rite of passage for group membership. To be accepted in the group, group members must travel on the group’s bus. Exceptions may be made if the reason for travelling by alternate means is one that the group deems to be legitimate. For example, one couple that did not travel on the bus was accepted by the group as health problems had militated against them travelling on the bus with the group. The couple was integrated into all activities at the destination others were not. The fact that group members who did not travel by bus were not normally integrated into group activities emphasises the importance of bus travel as well as the importance of adhering to group activities which are based around the social group itself, the primary point of identification of the long-term travel group.

The importance of group interaction in the travel mode choice is highlighted because the bus is one of only two forms of transport that the group considers a viable travel mode – the second being the train. When asked if they would ever consider taking an alternate means of transport group members explained that the only other mode that the group would even contemplate would be the train. Group members believe that, to some extent, travelling by train provides a similar space to that of the bus in that the group can move around and interact with other group members. However, it does not provide an insulated space as the trains are a public mode of transport and therefore are not limited solely to the group. Further, travelling by train is more expensive, and has a limited schedule as many long distance services are only run on some days of the week. Air transport which was comparable in price to bus travel at the time of the study was not considered a plausible alternative. Group members noted that air transport did not provide the benefits of interaction and camaraderie that were provided through travelling by bus. Like the supporter group this is inconsistent with the current literature on travel mode choice which suggests that time and cost are key considerations. Although bus travel is substantially more time consuming than travelling by plane, the bus is conducive for social interaction and camaraderie and provides a space that unites the group, while travelling by plane does not. Thus, the bus is the preferred method of travel for the long-term travel group.
As bus is the preferred mode of travel for the long-term travel group, the destination choice is limited to how far the group is willing to travel by bus. While travel time is not a consideration in choosing a mode of transport, it is a consideration when planning other trip elements. The travel time by bus to the destination closest to which the long-term travel group resides is approximately 36 hours each way. The next closest destination involves an additional 8 hours of travel time each way (44 hours each way). Given that the trip elements must cater for the group in its entirety, the extra eight hours travel time is not viewed as feasible, as illustrated in the following quotation:

We could spend another 8 hours on the bus like I said – 8 hours. The scenario we’ve got with 45 people going them days is achievable [totaling five days]. Another day added on is not achievable to fit in with everybody’s schedule. So Melbourne being 8 hours from Adelaide it’s just not on. Then you’d go on a plane, but then you lose what we’re coming on the bus for [the group experience]. (LG1, male)

Notice then, the group would not consider travelling an additional 8 hours (each way) by bus to reach the next closest destination. Given that plane travel would be used if the group travelled a greater distance, the group would essentially be sacrificing the group experience had on the bus. Therefore, the group would not consider travelling by plane as it does not allow the group to socialise while travelling. Some group members stated that they would not be able to attend the trip if it were to be any longer. One travel group member said: “If it was another day for me I’d be thinking. It’s not so much the monetary problems, but I’ve got commitments and I’ve stretched those commitments already, and couldn’t stretch them another day.” Another said, “I would not go to Melbourne or Sydney. Adelaide is the furthest I’d go. I’d fly if it were to anywhere else; it’s too far by bus. I’ve just managed this [the 36 hour bus trip].” The destination choice is therefore determined by how far the group as a whole is prepared to travel by bus.

The game that the group travels to watch is thereby limited to games that are held in the destination that the group is prepared to travel to by bus. Two teams reside in the destination to which the group travels. The team that the group travels to follow only plays once in the particular destination each year. Given the way the fixture is determined, the opposing team alternates from year to year. When the fixture is released, the group begins to plan its annual trip around when the team is scheduled to play at that destination. Given the consistencies in the key trip elements of mode of travel and destination, various activities during the trip also remain consistent. For example, from year to year the group stops at the same places en route, and visits the same places at the destination. Therefore, there are elements of the trip that are not included in the official itinerary, but remain consistent from year to year. Group members often recount these activities before they occur on the trip in anticipation of reliving experiences had on previous trips.
In summary, the composition of trip elements used by the long-term travel group are centred around accommodating for the social group itself. The trip in its entirety is built around the primary point of identification of the group, which is the group rather than the team. Social interaction and camaraderie are therefore key in choosing the mode of travel. The bus provides a common and insulated space for the group to interact, travel time is viewed as being more important than spending time at a destination where it is not always possible to experience the same interaction as on the bus. The destination to which the group travels and, by extension, the game that the group travels to watch is limited to one to which the group is prepared to travel by bus. As trip elements then remain similar from year to year, other activities not in the itinerary become integral parts of the trip that the group members anticipate and attempt to relive.

Temporary Travel Group. The choice of trip elements on a package tour is not a decision made by the travel group, as the temporary travel group is actually a collective of people who are united by shared participation on a package tour. The combination of trip elements included in organised or packaged tours is generally set by the team-related travel service. The temporary travel group is then a collective of individuals who participate on the same trip. When asked why they had chosen specific trip elements, respondents indicated that they had not considered each element, but had looked at the overall combination of trip elements included in the packaged option. One respondent put it this way: “We chose this [trip] because that was what was on offer.” (TG2, male). When individuals select from packages on offer, they do not consider all trip elements individually. Instead of considering each trip element separately, individuals investigate what packages are available and then choose the best available packaged option without considering all of the specific trip elements included in the package. One key factor in choosing a trip was the timing of the package. In particular, the timing of the package needs to coincide with the availability of discretionary time, as evidenced in the following quotation:

Well it’s a long-weekend so we’ve got the chance to get away. We can also stay an extra couple of days to do more [at the destination] without taking too much time off work. It’s kind of like a mini holiday then (TG1, female).

Notice the attractiveness of going on a trip on a long weekend. Long weekends typically coincide with when most people have an extended period of discretionary time. Being able to spend extra time at the destination is an element that is often considered by those who take part on these package tours.

Melbourne generally has particular destination appeal for those choosing to participate on a package tour. One respondent described the appeal of Melbourne this way: “where else can you see three [AFL] games on one weekend, and also go to the markets, do great shopping, and dining… most [is] in walking distance.” Melbourne is attractive because of the variety of activities that it offers. The geographic concentration of teams in the AFL in and around the Melbourne area allows individuals to attend more than one game on any
weekend. This is a feature not offered at any other destination. The shopping and dining facilities in Melbourne, which frequently feature in marketing communications about Melbourne, are also important because the enable trip participants to build more into their trip than just football.

The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), and by extension destination Melbourne, is recognised as the symbolic home of the AFL, which further adds to the appeal of the destination. In particular, respondents expressed the significance of watching a game at the MCG: “This is where it started, nothing beats this. This is the real thing, it’s where it all happens” (TG1, female). The significance of the MCG as an AFL icon was apparent, and spoken about in awe. The following field note further evidences this where a travel group took part in an official MCG tour as part of the package:

Everyone was excited and looking forward to walking on the field of the MCG. A couple of the younger guys had brought their footballs with them so that they could kick a goal at the MCG. There was consistent emphasis on the bragging rights that went along with kicking a goal, and even stepping foot on the MCG. Many of the participants wore team merchandise (clothes and scarves) on the tour so that photos of them could be taken on the ground with them in their team colours…. These were used as symbolic representations of the teams they supported. The tour took us through approximately half of the stadium. Many photos were taken during the tour, including the dressing rooms and hallways. The majority of photos taken were of the different views of the actual grounds…. There was a groundsman on the field at the time painting the 50 metre line in preparation for the match to be held two days later. Everyone had been told previously that they would be allowed to kick a footy around the grounds (and many had prepared to do so). One of the group members asked the tour guide if the group could go out onto the grounds. Unfortunately the response was negative, as the day that we were there was one of the few days of the year that people are not allowed on the ground because there was a game to be held there the following day (on a public holiday). A lot of people were very disappointed by this and commented that that was one of the main things that they wanted to do on the trip. One group member went as far as to ask the tour guide if he could just step on to the edge of the ground so that he could say that he’d been on the field of the MCG because that was one of the reasons for choosing the particular trip. (TG1, FN)
While the MCG holds symbolic value relating to the tradition and history of the AFL, other stadia also act as a unique (or novel) attraction. Specifically, Colonial Stadium (now known as the Telstradome) has a retractable roof, a feature that is available at no other AFL venue in Australia. The atmosphere that is said to be generated at the stadium when the roof is closed is a key motivation for individuals to choose a package which offers a game at the stadium. The following field note illustrates this point:

There was a lot of talk about the retractable roof. Two participants (a couple) who had been there before said that the atmosphere was absolutely amazing when the roof was closed, so they were hoping that the roof was closed for this game. It looked like it was going to rain, so it was a possibility. The couple who had been there before had also been to a game at the MCG the previous day. They said that Colonial Stadium doesn’t really compare to the MCG, but it does when the roof is shut. Those that had not been to Colonial before were hoping that the roof would be shut so that they too could experience the “amazing atmosphere” of being in an enclosed stadium. Some were indicating that one of the motivations for choosing the particular trip was to experience the atmosphere that was generated with the roof closed. They did, however, realise that there was a chance that this might not occur. (TG2, FN)

The stadia at Melbourne offer a unique experience that cannot be found at any other destination: the significance of the MCG as an AFL icon, and the atmosphere that an enclosed stadium offers at the Telstradome. Thus, the stadium in which the particular game included in the package is played can play a role in the choice between packages.

As not all trip elements are necessarily considered when choosing to participate on a packaged tour, those who set the packaged tours essentially influence the specific trip elements that trip participants can choose when partaking in this kind of travel. The packages that are designed and offered by the travel service provider also limit the trip elements that individuals can experience in participating in such a trip. When designing packages, travel-related services construct packages that they believe are going to attract the most people, as can be seen in the following response from a travel service provider:

We always offer finals packages, we get more going around then. Then, long weekends and holiday time are also popular, then you can combine more in the trip and make a holiday-like package. We also organise trips around key club rivalries. Since the majority of games are held in Melbourne, that’s where we go the most. It also gives the opportunity of seeing more than one game in a weekend…. We often include a tour of the MCG. (TG1, male)

Notice that these include elements which have been identified by participants as key: travel around long weekends, Melbourne as a destination, and the MCG. When designing trips the organisers include elements that are congruent with when possible participants have available
time and money. This is commonsensical as packaged tours must include a combination of trip elements that are both attractive to potential participants and coincide with availability of discretionary time and income. Packages that include travel during long-weekends or holidays dominate what is offered as they coincide with when many people have available discretionary time.

The dominant mode of travel for the temporary travel group is air travel. This is the case as those who set the packages set the most convenient option that would attract the largest consumer base. Plane travel maximises the amount of discretionary time spent at the destination. Some packages do not include transport to the destination but offer participants the flexibility of organising their own way to the destination at a time of convenience, and choosing how long they spend at the destination.

In summary, participation on an organised tour does not require consideration of each trip element individually. Instead, individuals choose between the particular packages on offer, which includes consideration of availability of discretionary time, and the attractiveness of the overall package. In choosing between packages and/or whether or not to participate on a package on offer, different individuals may put different emphasis on trip elements. The most frequently utilised packages include those that take place on long weekends where individuals have available discretionary time. Further, Melbourne is considered a key destination given the wide variety of activities offered at the destination (e.g., shopping, dining), and also hosts two stadia that have central significance to the AFL subculture.

Concluding Remarks

While at face value the three types of groups share some common trip elements, the reasons for choosing particular elements differ. The three distinct types of groups consider different trip elements when composing their trips, and formulate their trips in different ways. Not all trip elements require consideration for all groups as some are merely a consequence of decisions made about other trip elements. For the supporter group and the long term travel group, the points of identification of the group strongly influence trip elements. This is not the case for the temporary travel group as the group itself does not exist prior to the trip. Instead, the trip elements are decided based on choosing an organised package that best suits the needs of the individual. The following section compares and contrasts key trip elements of each group.

The supporter group travels to most away games, which displays a continual support for the team. The primary point of identification of the supporter group essentially directs the mode of travel undertaken by the group. In other words, the choice of mode of travel is primarily based around supporting the team. The group primarily travels by bus which enables the group to transport materials which allow the group to display physical support for the team at the game. A secondary consideration for choosing the bus is the ability to interact as a group in the bus. The long term travel group also utilises a bus for its trip. The primary reason for choosing a bus however, is different than that of the supporter groups. The choice
of bus for the long-term travel group is built around the primary point of identification of the group, that is the group itself. The bus offers a space that insulates the group from the outside world, and in which the group can interact. The mode of travel for the long-term travel group is the central trip element around which the trip is organised. In other words, all other elements of the trip that the group undertakes are based around travelling by bus as it best serves the purpose of what the group hopes to experience – celebrating the social group itself. The mode of travel utilised by the temporary travel group is air transport. Air transport is used as it is the most time-efficient method for travelling to a destination. Given the convenience of air transport, it is the most commonly included mode of travel in organised packages. Unlike the travel mode choice of the supporter group and the long-term travel group, the choice of transport for the temporary travel group is not based on group identity. This is commonsensical as when organising the trip, individuals are not yet part of a travel group. Thus, identification with the group emerges during the trip (if it emerges at all).

The three groups also differ in terms of the choice of destination. Destination is only a consideration for the supporter group if the group does not run a bus to that destination (Perth and Brisbane). The group does not differentiate between destinations to which the bus runs. Destinations to which no group bus runs (which are those distanced furthest from other destinations) are considered holiday destinations. In other words, group members who choose to attend these games fly to the destination for more than just the football. These group members stay for an extended period of time, and make a holiday out of the trip. For the long-term travel group, the destination affects the mode of travel that they undertake. As the group will only travel by bus as it is the only mode of transport that allows the group to have its own space in which the group can socialise and interact freely, the group will only travel to the destination which is closest to their home city (albeit 36 hours away). Travelling to any other destination would mean extending the trip, which is not possible given time constraints of the group members.

Melbourne is the most frequented destination for the temporary travel group, as it is central to the AFL community. In particular, Melbourne is the only destination which offers more than one game in any one weekend, and also hosts two stadia which have iconic significance in the AFL community. Individuals in these trips also seek standard tourist activities such as shopping and dining, which Melbourne provides.

The group structure clearly affects the way that the trips in which the groups participate are constructed. In particular, trip elements are chosen as they are the means of best allowing group members to showcase their shared identity. The combination of both group structure and trip elements affects the trip experience, by providing an environment that allows group members to celebrate what is central to the group.
This chapter has described the trip elements of each of the three types of travel groups, and why these characteristics were chosen. The following chapter identifies how these trip elements impact on (and in some cases facilitate) the process of socialisation and interaction during the trip experience. Specifically, it describes how each of the three types of groups evolve through the process of socialisation during the travel experience including the formation of ritual, folklore, and group norms.
CHAPTER SIX

Socialisation and Experience

Three distinct types of groups who travel to follow their team have been identified, with each having distinctly different experiences. The different types of experience are, in part, a function of the different formation, purpose, structure and points of identification that characterise each group. The composition and importance of trip elements that each group utilises also differ and affect the experience. Further analysis of the data suggests the experience of each of the groups was influenced by the process of socialisation of the group before, during, and after the travel experience. Socialisation in this chapter refers to the process in which individuals become part of the group. This is not to be confused with the act of socialising, which is interpreted as interaction and communication between group members. While the act of socialising can lead to the process of socialisation, the two terms are not isomorphic.

The socialisation that occurs before, during, and after the trip leads to the construction and confirmation of group norms through rituals, symbolisms, and folklore unique to each group. All of which ultimately affect the experience that each group has. Rituals, symbolisms and folklore are essentially socially constructed units of meaning which have commonly been examined as forms of “performance” in the anthropological and sociological study of culture (Bauman, 1984; Geertz, 1986; Turner & Bruner, 1986). Rituals are essentially social performances which are meaningful in a processual sense (Geertz, 1973). The purpose of performance is the sharing of identity (Fine & Speer, 1992). Folklore is any story that is embedded in the custom or tradition of a particular group that is expressed through language (Dundes, 1980). Thus, folklore exists within a social context. Meanings and ideas are thus projected through symbols, ritual, and folklore, which can be used in the understanding of identity. The continual socialisation that occurs shapes the group’s expectations and interpretations of the trip and the experience. This chapter describes the socialisation that occurs in each group based on the concepts of performance.

**Supporter Group**

The existent norms, rituals, symbolisms, and folklore of the supporter group relate not only to the travel group and the travel experience, but also to the wider scope of activities that the supporter group undertakes. This is because travelling to follow a team is only one activity in which supporter groups participate. In preparing for a trip, however, norms, rituals, symbolisms and folklore that relate specifically to the travel experience become particularly salient to trip participants. Most trip participants are repeat participants and are therefore familiar with the rituals and symbolisms that define and characterise the group’s travel experience. The sharing of memories of past experience – including rituals, symbolisms, and folklore – acts to define and reinforce what is central to the group. Sharing stories of past experience impacts upon the experience of the group insomuch as it shapes the expectations of trip participants, specifically importing meaning and value to particular
elements of the experience. During preparations for the trip, and during the trip itself many opportunities are presented through which group members discuss memories of past experience. Numerous memories that group members discuss resemble nostalgic recollections, as group members seek to relive these past experiences. The following section describes how coming together as a group (both in preparation for and during the travel experience) generates salient memories of past trips, and how sharing the stories affects the travel experience.

**Salient memories and folklore.** In preparing for a supporter group trip, the group congregates for two specific activities related to the trip. First, official supporter group meetings are held to discuss and disseminate information specifically pertaining to the pending supporter group trip. Second, in order to perform one of the core functions of the supporter group at the away game, displaying the team’s banner on the field, members of the supporter group meet to make the banner the week prior to the trip. While the meeting about the trip is specifically designed to centre around discussions of the pending trip, discussions about the trip are also dominant at the banner making meeting as group members anticipate the forthcoming trip. In preparing for the trip, discussions are not limited to the forthcoming trip. Instead, group members draw on past travel experiences in formulating expectations of the pending trip. Thus, these meetings often act as a medium through which individuals share stories of past travel experiences. For example, the following field note illustrates the role of the banner-making meeting in preparing individuals for the travel experience:

*Discussions about banner making were common. Although the activity of banner making is not unique to the away game experience (as banners are made for home games as well), making banners for away games conjures up conversations that are specifically relevant to travel. The group members expressed that attending the banner making session the week before an away game was a good chance to get together with the group and exchange stories about past trips and “get in the mood” for the forthcoming trip. It also gave group members the chance to discuss any particular activities that they hoped to participate in on the forthcoming trip (e.g., visit a particular restaurant, shop, or pub)…. (SG3, FN)*

By obtaining and sharing information about the activities that take place on a trip, and listening to stories of past experience that reflect the beliefs and values of the travel group at meetings, impressions and expectations about the trip experience are formed and shaped. During these meetings, individuals acquire information and reminisce about past trip experiences through contact with other supporter group members who have previously participated on the trip, some of whom may not be going on the forthcoming trip.

While the activity of banner making itself does not occur during the actual travel experience, it is a vital activity for supporter groups, in order to perform one of the group’s rituals on the trip, erecting the banner at the game. The banner experience is considered a
ritual as it is an activity that has symbolic importance for the supporter group, and is also part of the tradition of the league itself. As banner making takes place before the actual trip, the activity itself is not exclusive to supporter group members who travel to follow the team. Most people who participate in banner making are members of the supporter group. However not everyone who participates in the banner making activity travels to follow the team. Individuals who take part in banner making but not on the trips can impact the expectations of the trip participants by getting involved in conversations about the trip, as illustrated by the following quotation:

We mainly talk about the trip [at the banner making sessions the week before an away game]… who is going and who is not. What we’re going to get up to and milestones that are occurring at the game [e.g., a player’s 100th game]. If there is milestones that are happening in the game [that we travel to] they will generally be on the banner [in print]. Those that are not going usually wish us well. Most of them wish they were going too. A lot of them have done at least one trip. We talk about the really good times that we had on other trips and wish we could do it again – some bits are one offs, others we can do again, some bits we do all the time… They tell us to make sure we cheer loud, look after the boys [the team], show support, and make sure we do this and make sure we do that. They care what we do. We try and do what they say where we can. After all, we’re representing the club that they belong to. Our families do the same thing. They’re all fans as well. (SG2, male)

Interaction with individuals outside of the travel group can shape the way that the trip is viewed. In particular, impressions and expectations about the trip are influenced by interaction with supporter group members who do not travel to follow the team, other fans of the team, families, and peer groups. The opinions of significant others in the lead-up to the trip influence the way in which individuals view the trip. This is similar to other work in consumer behaviour relating to sport and tourism suggesting that significant others, including friends and family members, shape one’s opinions of consumption choices (Crompton, 1981; Holt, 1995; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Many of the discussions that take place emphasise the role of the travel group in supporting the team. The above quotation also alludes to the fact that travelling to follow the team is simply an extension of being a supporter of the team and a member of the supporter group. This is highlighted by the instructions given to the group, which emphasise core supporter activities such as cheering for the team and letting the players know that they have support at the game. The advice given to the group before the trip acts to remind the group of the purpose of the trip and the primary point of identification of the group, supporting the team.
Memories of past trips do not just become salient in the lead-up to the trip, but also become salient during the trip itself. Supporter group trips depart from the team’s clubhouse, which in itself is something akin to a ritual. Supporter groups meet at the club a couple of hours before the scheduled departure and interact with those who are going on the trip as well as other supporters, friends, and family who are not going on the trip. For example, one supporter group meets at their clubhouse to catch up and chat while waiting for the bus to arrive, while another supporter group schedules an official social club meeting at the clubhouse a couple of hours before departure. Meeting at the club prior to departure is particularly conducive for socialising to occur as the time and space provides many cues for which to discuss the group’s history, ritual, and folklore that specifically relates to the act of travel. In particular, group members congregate at the clubhouse dressed in official supporter apparel, with baggage that they have packed and prepared to take on the trip. Given these added cues and the anticipation of the pending experience, memories relating to previous trips become particularly salient. For example, the following field note illustrates how such cues can lead to the telling of stories about previous trips and the folklore of the group:

At the clubhouse, everyone was dressed in full team gear, and had their luggage by their sides. Everyone was continually talking about past trips and experiences. Even those who were not going on the trip but had been on previous trips were discussing their experiences. One of the most common conversations was about last year’s bus driver…. This was provoked in part because the bus had not yet arrived. Apparently the bus driver that the group had for the corresponding trip the year before had no idea where he was going and got lost on the way to the destination. In addition, he also parked in a no parking zone at the stadium [where the game was played] and received a parking fine. As each group member arrived at the club and did not see the bus out the front, they also commented on the same incident. (SG1, FN)

The incident with the bus driver had become part of this particular group’s folklore, relating specifically to the travel experience. The story had become preserved by the group for its anecdotal quality. While some stories may be defined as folklore, the two terms are not synonymous. Stories may relate to any past experience of the trip, whereas folklore is that which is central to, and preserved by the group. Stories of previous trips which are central to the group (including those relating to ritual and folklore) are communicated among supporter group members. These act to inform and reinforce the group’s norms and gives meaning and value to group rituals, and therefore shape expectations of the trip experience.
In addition to that which is unique to the travel experience, the clubhouse is filled with memorabilia pertaining to the history of the team and club in general, which in itself generates memories and sharing of stories that relate to supporting the team and club (rather than the travel experience per se). This is evidenced in the following field note:

Photos on the wall of teams of yesteryear, and premiership trophies displayed in glass cabinets are all around the clubhouse. These static displays seem to act as a catalyst which conjure up memories of the history surrounding the team. The history of the club and the team were common topics of conversations. Group members recited dates which had special meaning to the group, including dates of when the team won a premiership flag, when the team lost or won by a certain margin, specific moments in a game such as a legendary kick, extraordinary plays, and particular players. Some of these incidences happened at away games while others did not. Supporter group members viewed this knowledge as being central to the history of the team, and by extension to supporting the team. While not all of these stories related to games that the group had travelled to see, these stories were clearly important to the group. (SG1, FN)

The wider knowledge and stories about the team are evidently part of the folklore of the club/team, the supporter group itself, and by extension important to the travel group, which is essentially part of the supporter group. This illustrates that folklore that is pertinent to the group need not be about the travel experience itself, but also includes that which relates to the wider cause of supporting the team. This is commonsensical given that the act of travel is just one supporter group activity.

Stories of past team achievements and accolades serve as a basis through which the forthcoming game is interpreted. In other words, travel group members use stories of past team performance to interpret and predict what “might” happen in the game that they are travelling to watch. This wider folklore influences expectations relating to the game component of the trip. The stories of past experience are not used alone to interpret the game but are integrated with up-to-date information about the team to predict what might happen at the game that the group is travelling to watch. Often around departure time, there are official club meetings (held at the club) regarding the forthcoming match which serve to outline specific news relating to the team that is playing on game day. As a result, breaking news about the final team for game day is available while the group is waiting at the departure point. This is illustrated in the following field note:

While waiting for the bus to arrive, a group of people walked down from a room upstairs in the club. They were all adorning the team’s gear. They had just come from an official team meeting where the actual team arrangements for the forthcoming game were discussed. They were talking about which players were going to take part in the game, and which players were out
injured. This information was used to ascertain a “likely” scenario of how the game would play out. When they came down from upstairs everyone flocked to them to get the latest information. While some were coming on the trip, others were not…. When conveying the updated team information the group was using records, statistics and stories of past performances (off the top of their heads) to justify what might happen in the forthcoming game…. Those that were not going on the trip stayed and chatted to the travel group for a while, and then left offering words of encouragement to the group, telling the group to cheer loudly during the game and to have a good time. As people were leaving the club they were telling the group that they would look for us on TV when they watched the game live. It is not unusual for the supporter group to feature in the television coverage, given the seating position for the supporter group at the game just behind the goal posts. (SG1, FN)

By learning the latest information about the team, expectations of the game and, by extension, the trip were clearly affected. Group members use and integrate a combination of stories of past experiences with current happenings in the team to formulate their overall expectations of the game that they are travelling to see. The above quotation also illustrates the effect that non-trip participants can have on shaping the expectations of the trip. In particular, offering support and encouragement to the travel group as well as opinions on what may eventuate during the game, the non-trip participants reinforce the primary point of identification of the group, supporting the team. They also reinforce the centrality of the team and the game during the trip as the dominant conversation topic.

Coming together as a group at the departure point clearly generates salient memories of experiences had on past trips, and results in the telling and discussion of these memories. Conversations that reminisce about folklore and ritual of the group predominantly relate to supporting the team and the game. These conversations act to inform and reinforce the key values and beliefs of the group. The group’s folklore and memories of past experiences become salient in the minds of the trip participants and shape expectations of the trip.

While the presence at the departure point of those who are not in the travel group influences the socialisation that occurs, once the group has boarded the bus it is insulated from non-trip participants. The relationship between salient memories and the group’s ritual and folklore is reciprocal. In other words, just as memories of past experience remind and reinforce group ritual and folklore, enacting ritual and discussing folklore also evokes memories of previous trips, which become more salient. The following section discusses the rituals of the supporter group and the key memories and nostalgic recollections that occur during the trip.
Enacting ritual. Rituals are activities that are customarily repeated and hold central importance to the group. Travelling by bus is itself a ritual for the supporter group. The ritual is an important instantiation of the values and norms of the group. As described in the previous chapter, the choice of bus as the preferred travel mode is important and central to the supporter group as it enables the group to showcase a focal point of identification, support for the team.

There are various aspects of bus travel that possess special meaning for the group. During travel time, the group is encapsulated in the bus and isolated from outside influences. Everyone who is on the bus (with the exception of the driver) is a member of the supporter group. When boarding the bus, the group decorates it with team-related paraphernalia, as illustrated in the following field note:

As we got on the bus everyone started getting out their supporter gear and placing it all around the bus. Team related colours and merchandise were displayed prominently on the windscreen, windows, and seats, most of which was made visible (where possible) to those outside the bus…. Placing the items around the bus generated various discussions about the items. (SG1, FN)

Displaying team colours and merchandise represents support for the team, which is the primary point of identification for the supporter group. This activity has become a group ritual that serves to convert the bus into a space that represents and showcases symbolisms that are unique and central to the group. By placing items that represent the group in strategic and visible places (both to those on and off the bus), the group parades and celebrates their shared identity to those outside the bus. This activity reinforces the centrality of supporting the team to those inside the bus as the items that were displayed have particular meaning to the supporter group.

Displaying such symbols evokes memories and meaning that are attached to the items and symbols. For example, collector pins and badges that are displayed on scarves evoke particular memories relating to certain players and/or team achievements, as is illustrated in the following field-note:

Of the items used to decorate the bus, group members paid particular attention to scarves that were covered with collector pins and badges. After these scarves had been placed either on a window or on a seat, conversations about the particular events or occurrences that the pins represent were discussed. For example, badges of certain players evoked conversations about the players, career achievements, and in some cases sex appeal. (SG1, FN)

While the memories that are evoked in the above field-note do not relate to the travel experience itself, the memories do relate to that which is central to the group, support for the team. Nostalgic recollections of past team performances were generated from the memories.
That is, group members hoped to relive some of the experiences insomuch as they wanted to see particular plays or performances during the game that they were travelling to see. Enacting ritual, especially that which involved particular symbols of the group, evoked memories and nostalgic recollections related to the team and support for the team. The focus on the team itself illustrates that for supporter groups, travelling to follow the team is simply an extension of supporting the team.

Other rituals that supporter groups undertake while on the bus also centre around the team and support for the team. In particular, supporter groups carry out a series of activities on the bus that have special meaning to the group. Singing the official team song en route to the game is one such ritual. Singing the team’s song is one way in which the group displays and celebrates its shared identity. Another is holding raffles on the bus. The particular raffles that are of significance are those which offer prizes that have special meaning to the group and the team, as can be seen in the following field-note:

> The first raffle does not cost anything and everyone is guaranteed a prize. Everyone is given a ticket. Tickets are drawn out one by one until the last person has been called. Individuals select a prize when their ticket is drawn. Prizes include official team stickers, postcards, playing cards, keyrings, etc. Supporter group members donated some prizes while others were bought out of supporter group funds. Also included were handmade items that various group members had made. These included framed photos of various players, knitted scarves, and crafted teddy bears that were dressed in team colours. The raffle was free so as to involve the whole group. The group does this every trip. Like the items used to dress up the bus, each of these items generated discussion of particular team achievements, and also past trips. Discussions about items that group members had received on previous trips were also prevalent…. The raffles were spoken about as if they had symbolic importance to the group. (SG3, FN)

By offering prizes that are team specific, special meaning is attributed to the raffle as the group views the raffle as an activity that reinforces the central identity of the group. Activities such as singing the team song and holding raffles on the bus with team-related prizes were viewed as ritualistic. These activities are not ritualistic in that they were consistent from trip to trip but because they had developed special meaning to the group – all of which related to the team. Similarly, group rituals that take place at the destination also centre around the team and support for the team. For example, visiting pubs that have a connection with the team, holding up the banner at the game, and attending the team’s official post-game function are all supporter group rituals, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> Bell’s Hotel is the official team hotel. Billy Bell [an avid supporter of the team] owns it [the hotel]. We have all of the team’s functions there when we’re here [in the destination], including the victory party, even if we lose.
That’s a ritual – we all meet up there before the game, and also for the post-game function. All the players attend that. We like to go and say hi and show a bit of support…. At the game I guess there’s the banner. We do that all the time – that’s pretty special. (SG1, female)

The rituals that supporter groups enact while on trip clearly relate to the team, rather than the experience of travel per se. Not only do these rituals relate to the team, they relate to visibly showing support for the team. In other words, the activities that are considered group ritual are those that allow the group to parade and celebrate the shared identity of supporting the team. Likewise, the conversations that took place during supporter group trips centred predominantly on the team itself rather than the travel experience. This was particularly evident during supporter group Express Trips (which do not involve accommodation at the destination). This is illustrated in the following field-note:

Talk amongst the group centred around the team, football, and the specific game that we were travelling to watch. There was constant reference about the purpose of the trip being about “the footy.” The sole purpose was the football and nothing else. Minimal conversations related to the act of travel, or activities at the destination. Any other activities at the destination were seen as just filling in time between when the group arrived at the destination and when the football match was on. (SG1, FN)

While this field note was taken from an express trip, these issues remain central for supporter groups who undertake regular trips (with accommodation). Both the express trips and regular trips taken by supporter groups are for the primary purpose of supporting the team. It seems commonsensical, then, that the rituals of the group are centred around support for the team. Given the added time spent at the destination for regular season trips, the group utilises elements other than football and the team as components of the trip. However, these additional activities at the destination do not have ritual status. That is, additional activities that group members engage in at the destination such as shopping, or visiting destination attractions may be repeated from trip-to-trip, but have no specific or special meaning to the group itself.

For supporter groups, travelling to follow the team is evidently an extension of being part of the supporter group. Ritual and folklore of the group are centred around the primary point of identification of the supporter group, support for the team, rather than the travel experience itself. Simply repeating tourist behaviours at the destination such as shopping and dining is not sufficient for these activities to be incorporated into ritual as the group’s beliefs and values are centred around showing support for the team. Preparing for the trip, and participating on the trip allow memories of past trips and past team performance to become particularly salient. Telling stories of folklore, and enacting rituals during the trip which centre around support for the team, reinforce the key values and beliefs of the group, shape the expectations of trip participants and how experiences are interpreted.
Long-term Travel Group

While travel is only one activity in which the supporter group engages, and the group utilises folklore and rituals that are not travel-specific, travel is the sole activity of the long-term travel group. In preparing for a trip, long-term travel groups have an organised meeting during which the final details of the trip are decided. During these informal meetings memories of past trips become particularly salient. These memories act as a catalyst for nostalgic reminiscences and the telling and retelling of stories that are central to the group. The memories that are spoken about with fervour emphasise the norms and rituals of the group, most of which relate to the social group itself. By coming together and talking about past experiences of the group, the collective memory of the group becomes more cohesive as group members remind each other of experiences that they feel are central and important.

Group members also come into contact with each other through other activities during the lead up to the trip. For example, certain group members volunteer at the football club weekly. During the lead up to the trip, their discussions centre around the pending trip and happenings on previous trips. Others share and discuss photos from previous trips, as can be seen in the following field note:

Before the trip while I was staying with the trip organiser, I was shown a number of photo albums full of photos from previous trips. Each photo was explained to me in terms of the people in it, the place where it was taken, as well as stories of group significance and ritual that were associated with each photo. (LG1, FN)

The photos from previous trips represent tangible evidence to group members of their trip. Going through photos from previous trips acts to evoke and reinforce memories from previous trips, illustrating the importance of possessions in maintaining a sense of past (see Belk, 1990; Csikszenmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). These discussions about previous trips shape the expectations that group members have for the following trip.

Norms, ritual, and folklore. The trip, especially travelling by bus is the focal activity that legitimises the long-term travel group. Participants noted that the trip had become “a prophecy.” The trip itself, then, can be seen as something akin to a ritual. The mode of transport was the most apparent group ritual, in that the bus has symbolic importance to the group and is used to define the group: the Bus Trekkers. While other supporters of the team were also travelling to watch the same game as the Bus Trekkers, those who do not travel on the bus with the group are not accepted into the group unless they can offer a reason that the group deems legitimate.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the choice of bus for the travel group is based upon its ability to allow group members to socialise and interact during the course of the trip. It follows that camaraderie, meeting people and social interaction are key factors in the ritual of bus travel. The bus provides a form of insulated adventure for the group, segregating the group from outside influences, thus providing a space that is unique to the group (Schmidt,
The unique space allows the group to engage in activities that demonstrate and celebrate the norms and rituals central to the group’s identity. Rituals of the long-term travel group are purposefully designed to maximise group participation and interaction. For example, activities on the bus that form part of the group ritual include playing trivia games about various topics (including geography, sport, and general knowledge), joke telling and singing. All group members are actively encouraged to participate. While there were prizes for winning the trivia competitions, group cooperation and having a good time took precedence over winning. When some group members won a prize, they opted not to take the prize as that was not what “it’s [the purpose of the activity] all about.” Thus, the activities and rituals on the bus are designed to celebrate the importance of the social group.

While subgroups were evident within the group, the boundaries between the subgroups were permeable, as all group members interacted with all others. The subgroups which did exist were based on age. However, age did not affect communication and interaction during the trip. In fact some group members, particularly the older members, discuss the cohesiveness of the group and the way that it breaks through age differences. One respondent put it this way:

We get on so well together. Being different age groups, there’s oldies and middle aged and youngies and all sorts. Because we all get on so well together and it just makes a good trip. (LG1, female 1)

Other group members noted that although the group is diverse, the common element of support for the team makes other differences irrelevant during the trip:

[The trip is composed of] people from all walks of life, with all different interests, with one interest in common – we’re all mad [team] supporters.

You don’t get much of that these days. (LG1, female 2)

It is evident from these quotations that normal social boundaries do not apply while on the trip. Notice also the contrast between the diversity of the group and what “you don’t get much of… these days.” This suggests that the group and the group experience is seen as distinct and different from everyday life. The absence of social boundaries accompanied with the experience being perceived as outside of one’s “everyday life” is consistent with what Turner (1974) refers to as a liminoid sense of communitas. The absence of social boundaries is assisted by the groups’ focal point of identification, the social group itself. The liminoid state expedites the process of socialisation as traditional barriers to socialising are absent. In other words, individuals become part of the group and are accepted into the group more quickly.
The social element formed the basis for ritual and nostalgic reminiscences. Some of the nostalgic reminiscences specifically related to the liminoid state of communitas, as can be seen in the following response:

I think it [camaraderie] would be the biggest part in my eyes. The fact that you have the bonding. And the good thing that I find about it is that there are differences within the group, but we are all part of the group. (LG1, female)

The ritual and nostalgia are not related to the team or the game that the group is travelling to see; rather, they are related to the social experiences gained from being part of a group in a liminoid state. The secondary place of the team to the group was emphasised when the group attended the official “Players’ Breakfast” the day after the game, as illustrated in the following field-note:

We went to the Players’ Breakfast. There were three tables specifically reserved for the Bus Trekkers. Most of the players were present. A couple of the players got up and spoke, as did a representative from the club, and members of the coaching staff. Special acknowledgement was given to the Bus Trekkers for travelling to support the team…. The group did not have much interaction with the players. While other attendees at the breakfast actively sought out the players for autographs and photos, the Bus Trekkers were taking photos of the group itself. A number of group members even claimed that the breakfast was about “The Trekkers” and not about the players. (LG1, FN)

This quote illustrates that although support for the team is the common point of reference that unites the group, what is more important to the group is the camaraderie and interaction within the group. This is further illustrated in that the folklore of the group centres around the social experiences garnered from group ritual and trip occurrences.

The group’s folklore included reference to various places that the bus had stopped during both directions of travel. In particular, folklore centres upon the tradition and significance of particular stops, based on the ritual performed at each stops. This following field note illustrates this:

There were a lot of stops that have become something of a ritual for the trip. For example, everyone was talking about stopping at Ceduna for a meal of King George whiting, and Southern Cross as the place for the last hurrah on the way home. There was also constant reference to “dressing up the bus” when they drive into [the destination]. (LG1, FN)

Approaching stops, group members discuss the relevance of the stops to the trip. In some instances particular stops were discussed well in advance. For example, the last stop of the trip, was continually discussed on the way to the destination. In effect, stories of past group experience relating to the stops form part of the group’s folklore. The folklore is told and retold throughout the trip as group members reminisce about their past experiences. One
The ritual that is spoken about throughout the trip is “dressing up the bus” at the last stop before driving into the destination as illustrated in the following field-note:

At the last stop before the final destination the group puts up scarves, banners and other team and group related paraphernalia both inside and outside the bus. They then drive into the destination with the team’s song blaring from the speakers. Not a lot of the group members knew the words to the song though. (LG1, FN)

This activity in essence is a form of parading and celebrating the activity that unites the group – the team. It is purposefully designed as a group activity to get everyone involved. Notice also that the symbols used to decorate are not related just to the team itself, but include items which are customised to the travel group specifically. For example, banners and shirts that were customised with “Bus Trekkers” printed on them were used. The presence of banners specifically made for the group illustrates the importance of the “group” experience rather than just support for the team. The fact that the group did not know the team’s official song also highlights this point.

Other rituals of the group that group members continually reminisce about relate not to the team, but to the social group itself. One participant described the following:

We’ve got to listen to [a certain group member’s] jokes – big ritual that one. I tell you what, we’ve got some people here that entertain and they do it every year and they do a good job…. Then we go to Southern Cross – we have our inaugural break up at Southern Cross. That’s when we all sort of have our last beer together, last feed together. And obviously, that night where we go out for a feed down in [a suburb of the destination], we’ve made a tradition of it over the years – all sit at a table together and have a feed. It’s like the Last Supper. We’ve done that every year. We’ve religiously done that and gone to Hahndorf. I don’t know why but we go to Hahndorf every year. (LG1, male)

Using references such as “Last Supper” and “religiously” suggests that these activities have a sacred meaning to the group. Note that the description of these activities attributes special emphasis on the group being together, and the ritual within it is based upon celebrating the social group.

In one instance, the group was not able to perform a particular ritual that is referred to in the above quotation as an activity that the group “religiously” participates in, given circumstances outside of the group’s control. One of the activities that group members spoke about during the trip was a day tour that they take each year to a small village. The group usually spends the day at the destination and has various activities which they engage in ritualistically at the destination including having a group meal at a pub, and purchasing certain items. However, since the bus driver had made a double booking on that day – to the
group and to another tour group – engaging in this particular activity was not possible, as illustrated in the following field note:

We got ready for the tour. When we got to the bus, the bus driver told us that we had to stop and pick up another group. We got on the bus and drove to the airport to pick the other group up instead of to the destination where we were supposed to spend the day…. When we were picking the other group up, we were told to all get over the one side of the bus so that they could fill up the other side. The mood of the group totally changed when the second group boarded. This was in part because we were all one behind the other and no one wanted to sing or do anything silly in front of the other group. The group continually expressed disappointment in not being able to spend the whole day at the destination, and therefore not being able to perform particular activities at the destination, which had central importance to the group. (LG1, FN)

The fact that the group did not perform this particular ritual generated nostalgic recollections about previous trips and what the group was missing by not being able to enact the ritual. Telling and retelling stories of past experiences enacting the ritual (which centred around being together as a group) further reinforced the importance of the social group. The presence of an outgroup on the bus (the second tour group) also affected the experience of the group. During the time that the second group was on the bus, the dynamics of the group changed (because others occupied some of the group’s space). Afterwards, group members expressed that they liked the people in the other tour group, but that they had no place on “our bus.” Given the bus was perceived as “group space” and the trip about the “social group,” the presence of an outgroup was not well accepted. The outgroup not only intruded upon the group’s space but also prevented the group from performing a particular ritual.

In another instance, the group was able to make certain compensations to ensure that they could perform rituals that were central to the group, as is illustrated in the following field note:

One particular stop, which had ritualistic significance, involved a meal at a stop. It was the first major meal for the trip, and the first time on the trip that the whole group could get together outside of the bus. Although substantially past regular mealtime, the group decided not to get any dinner until arriving at that particular stop. (LG1, FN)

The group was adamant about performing the ritual, as it was an activity that had special meaning to the group. In this instance the group had control over whether or not they would perform the particular ritual. In the previous case, the group did not. This illustrates that group members seek to relive good times that they recall from previous trips, and enact ritual which are central to the group.
The majority of participants on the long-term travel group trip are repeat participants. Nevertheless, there are some first-time participants. The following section describes how first-timers (or newcomers) are socialised into the group.

**Newcomer socialisation.** While memories of previous trips, ritual and folklore become particularly salient in the minds of group members who had participated on the trip previously, one would expect that this would not be the case for the newcomer. However, through group members telling stories to the whole group, the first timers were able to relive past experience vicariously. With the added emphasis that the long-term travel group places on camaraderie, repeat trip participants were particularly keen to share with the first timers the meaning and significance of particular rituals, and stories to the group as can be seen in the following field-note:

> It was important that everybody knew what was going on on the trip. That included the first timers. If someone started referring back to something that happened on a previous trip, there would always be someone there to explain the happenings in depth to the newcomers. For example, on the bus trip going to the destination, group members were continually talking about certain stops on the return bus trips that had particular ritualistic significance, like the final stop and the activities engaged in at the stop. (LG1, FN)

Through listening to, and specifically being told stories of previous trips, newcomers became aware of the rituals and symbols that are important to the group. The first timers used this information to interpret happenings on the trip. One participant put it this way, “They’ve got some things happening on past trips that we don’t know about, but they usually tell us what it was so we can see the funny side of it.” While making a conscious effort to inform the newcomers of various aspects of the trip, those who have been on the trip before are also keen to make the newcomers feel that they are a welcome and integral part of the group as can be seen in the following field-note:

> When each of the quizzes was held, group members were particularly keen to get newcomers involved. For instance, the group held a quiz about the group’s home state geography. Given that I was from a different state and knew minimal about it, all group members tried to assist me. In another quiz, another newcomer did rather poorly on a quiz. The group decided to give him a prize as encouragement to make him feel as though he was part of the group. (LG1, FN)

These actions are consistent with the group maintaining its primary point of identification, the social group itself. Involving newcomers is a way of parading, celebrating, and socialising newcomers into the shared identity. Throughout the trip the newcomers are socialised into the group. Throughout the trip newcomers began to reflect upon nostalgia that they had only heard about through group discussion. By the end of the trip, newcomers’ descriptions of the group and the elements that are most central to the trip mirrored those of long-time members.
For example, when asked what could be done (if anything) to improve the trip the next time, newcomers used nostalgic recollections of experiences that they had been told during the trip:

We should have an official organiser like on previous trips. It would also have been good to spend the full day at [a particular tourist destination] like on other trips. I think we missed out on a lot by not doing that. (LG1, male)

Throughout the trip first timers are socialised into the group and begin to use group folklore and ritual as if they were there when it happened on previous trips.

The bus driver on the trip observed the evolution of the group throughout the trip. When the bus driver on the long-term travel group was asked to describe the group during the travel experience, he responded by referring to the benefits of coach touring in general:

With coach touring what we find is that there are three things that make up a good tour. One of them is the companionship, the friendships that develop. The new friendships, the old friendships, they get away from existing relationships or whatever for friendships with other people…. So new companionship is one thing. I think the other thing is places of interest to see – like when you go by coach there is always something different, something changes, you mix and meet with other people, whereas if you’re flying or going by car, quite often it’s not as easy to mix with other people and that when you pull into a pub like we did at lunchtime. The third aspect is really the atmosphere or the environment that the group develops. Like it’s individuals coming together as a group, but by the last day everyone is a lot more relaxed about communicating with everyone else. You get to find out more about people and all those sorts of things, which I think makes coach touring one of the best ways of touring around the world…. This gives them a chance to get totally away from all of that [everyday life] and do something totally different. (LG1, male)

While referring to the benefits of coach touring in general, the experience was similar for the long-term travel group. Even though the long-term travel group is a pre-existing group, companionship and friendships were created and reinforced throughout the trip. Additionally newcomers to the group began communicating with the rest of the group and were socialised into the group during the trip through group members exchanging and sharing stories of the group’s folklore and rituals. Notice also the suggestion that there is always “something different” on each trip. While past trips are being relived throughout the trip, the current trip is being lived for the first time. The group makes ongoing comparisons during the trip to past trips, which serve to reinforce what is central to the group.
During the trip, the telling and retelling of folklore makes memories particularly salient and amplifies the affect associated with each memory. Actively participating in the rituals which form the basis of the majority of the group’s folklore evokes memories of past trip experiences and their associated effect. The telling and retelling of stories evokes nostalgia in a manner that solidifies the group.

**Temporary Travel Group**

The temporary travel group does not exist prior to travel. Instead, the temporary travel group begins as a collective of individuals who are united by shared participation on the same organised package tour. The group is temporary in that it is formed for the purposes of the trip and disbands upon completion.

While the group generally travels from the same destination, the collective of individuals is not united until participants are at the destination, as there is not necessarily an official departure point or time that is shared by all participants. For some packages, travel to the destination is included, whereas other packages only include the activities at the destination. Therefore, some individuals are left to book transport individually. For those packages that include travel to and from the destination, the travel agent generally books a fixed number of seats on one particular flight. Plane travel is an open form of public transport. Therefore, individuals who are participating on the trip will not necessarily sit next to (or near) other trip participants, even if they do share the same flight. Further, trip participants may not be readily identifiable to each other, as they are not all known to each other prior to the trip. Often, the only individual commonly known to all trip participants at the beginning of the trip is the trip organiser. Socialising with other trip participants is therefore limited until all of the participants have arrived at the destination and are organised into a readily identifiable collective that performs common activities.

Temporary travel groups often meet at a designated time and place at the destination. The trip organiser is the central conduit through which group members communicate, and is often the only person who group members are familiar with at the beginning of the trip. Therefore, the trip organiser can have considerable influence over the socialisation that occurs during the trip.
As the travel group does not exist before meeting at the destination, there is no ritual that is relevant to the travel group per se. However, the trip organiser is often familiar with happenings on previous trips which he/she may discuss with participants on each trip, and therefore preserve what would seem to be folklore of the travel service. This is evidenced in the following field-note:

[The trip organiser] was continually telling the group stories about the experiences of groups on other organised packages that he had observed. These stories were consistently repeated throughout the trip, including both the trip organiser telling different subgroups of participants, as well as participants who had heard the stories passing them on to other participants. (TG1, FN)

The stories that the trip organiser shares with trip participants could be understood as folklore of the travel service per se, rather than any particular travel group. The stories that the trip organiser shares with the trip participants act to shape the expectations of trip participants, as they generally participate in similar activities to that of previous trips. In particular, the sharing of stories shaped how individuals viewed the activities that they were participating in.

As the trip is organised through a club travel service, most participants have some kind of connection with the team. Trip members use the common bond of the team as a conversation point, often sharing with each other particular folklore that relates to the specific team or club. These discussions are used to shape the expectations of what to expect in the team game that they travelled to follow. Group members also define themselves as travel group members, and use their shared participation on a packaged tour as a basis for conversation. These discussions are used to shape expectations of what to expect at the destination and during the travel experience.

Some organised package tours include various activities in which all participants engage. For example, a team-related function (pre-match or post-match) is generally included, as is game attendance. Additionally activities such as tours, and attendance at other sport events at the destination may be included. During these activities the travel group is visibly evident. In other words, through shared participation in various activities (often under the trip organiser's directions), participants form a visible group. At team games and functions, there are designated seating areas which are set aside for the travel participants as illustrated in the following quotation:

There was a round table reserved specifically for the group. It had a placard placed in the middle of the table with the name of the travel group written upon it. There was also a designated seating area for the group at the game. The group was also singled out and acknowledged during an official function. (TG2, FN)

Through shared participation in activities on the trip, (which is complemented by the visibility of the travel group), what began as a loosely bound collective gradually became a coherent
group. This is congruent to work by Gorman (1979) and Schmidt (1979) suggesting that through participation in an organised package tour, complete strangers can form a group during the trip. The group only lasts for the length of the trip and then disbands on conclusion of the trip.

Summary

The constant process of socialisation that occurs before and during a trip affects subsequent trip happenings, and how group members interpret their experiences. The role and focus of socialisation was different for each group.

Telling folklore and enacting ritual throughout the trip imports meaning both to the trip itself and to group membership. In particular, folklore is used to teach and reinforce the core norms and values of the group. Ritual is an important instantiation of the core values and norms of the group. While various trip elements that supporter groups and long-term travel groups utilise may seem similar at face value, the focus of the group’s folklore and ritual are vastly different. For the supporter group meaning is derived from support for a particular team, whereas for the long-term travel group meaning and value is derived from the social group itself. For the long-term travel group, what is more important is being together as a group and celebrating the social benefits derived from a liminoid state of communitas. The team is of secondary importance. The elevated importance that the long-term travel group places on camaraderie and social interaction, and the absence of traditional status barriers, expedites the process of socialisation of newcomers. As the third type of group is a loosely bound collective which forms a temporary travel group ritual and folklore relating to the particular group are non-existent.

Memories of previous trips become particularly salient as many cues are provided while both preparing for the trip and participating on the trip, to evoke particular memories relating to both the group and/or the trip. Some of these memories are in fact nostalgic reminiscences for previous experiences. Telling and retelling stories of past trips, ritual, and folklore acts to remind and reinforce what is central to the group. Reminiscing about what is central to the group shapes the expectations of trip participants and they way in which the subsequent experience is interpreted.
CHAPTER SEVEN  
The Game Experience  

As the groups under study are those who travel to follow a sport team, one would expect the game to be an important element of the travel experience. Through analysis of the data it became apparent that the game plays a different role in the overall travel experience for each of the three types of groups. Further, each group experiences the game differently. The previous three chapters have identified the structure, behaviours, and experiences of the groups that travel, the travel elements for each trip, and the socialisation that occurs during the experience. The game is essentially the activity that legitimises each group. That is, each group is travelling to follow a team playing at an away venue. The game venue provides a different social setting than is provided during other parts of the travel experience, and therefore is considered separately here. Specifically, the game provides a setting in which the travel groups come into contact with fans of the opposing team, as well as fans of the same team who did not travel. The following chapter details the game experience and each group’s reaction to the game outcome.

Supporter Group

The following section describes the game experience of the supporter group, and how the shared identity of the supporter group is used to interpret the experience. As indicated in previous chapters, the primary point of identification of the supporter group is to support the team. It follows that the game has central importance in the travel experience of supporter groups, as the game is where the group can support, and more importantly, can visibly show its support for the team. The game provides a unique setting where supporter group members can parade and celebrate their shared identity, both as supporters of the team, and as members of the supporter group. The supporter groups dress in team colours for the game and enter the stadium as a visible minority, as the stadium is packed by a large percentage of home team supporters dressed in their own team colours. The supporter groups have a designated seating area, often behind the goals at one end of the field. The area is cornered off specifically for the supporter group and fans of the visiting team. This is explained in the following field note:

Once we got inside the gates, there was a section blocked off especially for the team’s supporters, behind the goal posts. This is the official supporter group area. The supporter group for the home team sits directly opposite the field. Group members were allowed to sit anywhere within the corded off area. Alcohol is not allowed in the supporter group area. Everyone was getting excited and eagerly waiting for the players to enter the field. Those with mobile phones started calling friends and relatives to say that they were at the game and the group was seated just behind the goal posts, so that others could look for them during the television coverage. (SG1, FN)
The location of the supporter group area is consistent throughout the league. The existence and positioning of the seating area allows supporter group members the opportunity to interact with other team supporters who did not travel (or who did not travel with the group). At most venues, the official supporter group area is located behind the goal posts at either end of the field, while for some venues the area is to the side of the goal posts, as that area is more conveniently accessed by broadcast media. Television coverage of the supporter group areas is common, as the groups provide colourful and animated reactions to the on-field action.

As the supporter group sits at the front of the cornered off section for visiting team supporters there is a greater chance that group members will be included in the television coverage. The increased possibility of being included on the television coverage as a “face in the crowd” adds to the excitement at the away game, and increases the potential audience to which supporters can demonstrate their attendance at the game. As can be seen in the above field note, supporter group members call friends and relatives to alert them to the fact that they are at the away game, prompting them to look closely at the television coverage to see if they can see them. Regardless of whether supporter group members are actually included in the media coverage of the game, calling home is a means through which supporter group members communicate their actions and identity to significant others. In particular, calling significant others is a means by which supporter group members show their support for the team by highlighting that they travelled substantial distances to support the team, as only a minority do.

Supporter group members also seek to display their identity to players at the game. Showing the team that the group is there to support them legitimises the group. It is central to the group that the players are aware that the group has travelled to see them. One respondent put it this way: “The fact that we can support the players by going up to all these grounds…. We get to see them if we go onto the ground [with the banner] so they know that we’re there if they see us holding up the banner.” Linking back to the primary point of identification of the group, support for the team, part of the motivation for travelling to away games is to show the players that the group is there to support the team. It is therefore important that the supporter group provides a presence that is visible to the players. As the number of supporters at away games is much smaller than that at home games, the players are able to give directed and personal attention to supporter group members. The supporter group members are able to receive more individual attention from the players and team officials while at away games. The personal acknowledgements that group members receive from the players reinforce and strengthen their identity as key supporters of the team:

At the player function group members were able to interact with players on a personal level. The supporters expressed that they weren’t able to do this at home games given that there are a greater number of supporters at home games who seek interaction with the players. Group members expressed that it was the personal interactions with players that allowed them to show “the
boys” that they were there supporting the team. The supporters claimed that the acknowledgements from the players made them feel as though they were “real supporters,” supporting the team at the game. (SG2, FN)

Being at the game and supporting the team gives supporter group members a sense of pride that they’ve made an additional effort in travelling to the away games to support the team. One respondent put it this way: “You get kind of proud that you follow them and that pride, the sense of pride that you’ve been there and supported them no matter what.” (SG3, female) This sense of pride is a means of personal gratification that supporter group members value. Interestingly, supporter group members feel that their efforts in following the team are of greater worth if the team is not successful on-field. They believe that supporting the team even when the team loses demonstrates a greater commitment to the team. It is also important for supporter group members to display their identity to opposition supporters. One respondent put it this way:

It’s that challenge to make yourself louder and be seen, and say, “Giddy up boys we’re here for you no matter what. We’re here for you.” Just to say to the opposition supporters that we are here. (SG3, female)

Notice, the above response refers to showing the supporter identity to the players, and also to supporters of the opposition. The players and, by extension, the team are essentially the reason for which the supporter group exists as the group’s purpose is to support the team. On the other hand, supporter group members are distinct from supporters of the other team. The distinction becomes particularly salient given the visible differences between the groups at the game which are aided by team-related apparel and cheer paraphernalia. Additionally, the designated seating area for supporters of the travelling team, accompanied by the security guards who surround the supporter group area for safety reasons further heightens the distinctions between the two groups. Whereas supporter group members use the fact that they had travelled to follow the team to differentiate themselves from those who do not travel (or those who do not stick by the team when the team loses), supporter group members blend in with other supporters of the team at the game. This is especially true given the provision of the seating arrangements, which encourage fans of the away team to sit together to form a visible minority.

While the supporter group often carries out similar activities at the away game as they do at home games, the experience often differs greatly given that they are the minority. The following section describes the role and experience of the supporter group at away games at the venue before the actual game begins. Before the game the supporter group, or various members of the supporter group have to perform the official duties of erecting the team’s banner in the middle of the field for the players to run through. The banner activity is central to the supporter group identity as it allows members to visibly display their support for the team in front of a wide audience.
The banner experience. The supporter group has official duties to carry out at the stadium before the game begins. Specifically, the supporter group has the role of displaying the team’s banner in the middle of the field before the game. Displaying team banner in the middle of the field is an AFL tradition. The players run through the banner as they enter the field. The supporter groups arrive at the game venue before the gates open in order to prepare the banner for the activity. Preparations include attaching the team’s banner (made out of crepe paper) to large metal poles and prepare the banner for display on the field before the game begins. Erecting the banner in the middle of the field is a large part of showcasing the group’s identity. Taking place in the middle of the field, the banner activity provides an opportunity to display the group’s identity to other supporters of the team at the game, the supporters of the home team at the game, the players, as well as to those who watch the media coverage of the game (including supporters of the team at the home destination, and friends and relatives).

As described in previous chapters, a large part of the banner is prepared prior to the actual trip. Not everyone who is involved in the banner making (which happens at the home venue) travels to follow the team, and not everyone who travels to follow the team is involved in banner making. However, there is generally a core group of supporters who are involved in putting the banner together once at the destination.

Only 22 people are allowed on the field at any one time to hold up the banner. The opportunity to go onto the field is therefore limited, and is rare for many of the team’s supporters. As there are fewer supporters of the away team at the game, attending away games increases the opportunity for some supporters who would not usually get the chance to be involved in the banner experience at home games. For those who are given the opportunity to participate in the banner experience for the first time at an away game, the particular activity adds value to the travel experience as can be seen in the following field note:

Various group members were handed little passes to get them onto the field so as they could hold up the banner. Those with mobile phones got in contact with friends and family to let them know that they would be holding up the banner. Mobile phones were being shared around the group so as those without mobile phones could also contact people. We had to walk out past a number of fans of the other team to get to the field. There was a lot of friendly banter as to what the outcome of the game might be. Three ladies who were chosen to hold up the banner were saying that their hearts were pounding so quickly and that the adrenalin [generated from the chance to go out onto the field to hold up the banner] was “just unbelievable” – especially as the players run right through the banner (and therefore past those holding it up) when entering the field. One group member exclaimed that it was the “best experience” and it would be worth losing her job over if her boss saw
her on television (as she’d called in sick to go on the trip). Another group member described the experience as “better than sex.” The players ran out and everyone was excited to be so close to the players. Various group members picked up pieces of the banner, which they took as mementos of the experience. Some even said that they would frame the pieces of crepe paper.

(SG1, FN)

As can be seen from the above field note, the opportunity to be involved in the banner experience conjures up feelings of excitement among participants. The opportunities to be on the field, “so close to” the players, and possibly included in the television coverage were key. Since so few supporters are afforded the opportunity to be involved in the banner experience, (especially given that there is a core group who are involved in the activity on a weekly basis) the experience is perceived as being one of privilege and prestige. This allows those involved to feel that they are part of the innermost circle of supporters with access to the behind the scenes preparations for the game. For many, the opportunity to be involved in the banner experience would not exist at home games. Being at an away game, with a reduced number of team supporters provided others with the opportunity to be part of the banner experience. Keeping the crepe paper as a memento provided proof that those involved were on the field and involved in the banner experience. Part of the associated bragging rights was being so close to the players:

A couple of the injured players were standing around in the area so everyone was getting excited and some were saying hello to the players. Also, a couple of the trainers and coaches walked past. At this stage the players were all out on the field warming up. They eventually ran past us, and a number of group members said hi to them, with a minimal response. This is usual, however, as the players must be focused on their game. (SG3, FN)

The opportunity to be involved in the banner experience and to be out on the field provides a platform through which to not only display the supporter identity, but also to reinforce the identity by being “part of the action.” Being out on the field, and having the players run past and the officials nearby helps showcase the supporter identity to those who they are supporting. In addition, it communicates to others that they are part of an ‘insider group’ that is connected to the team in a way only a few people have the opportunity to be. It is not just other supporters to whom they wish to show this identity. Showing support for the team is central to the identity of the supporter group. Thus, being close to the players (while out on the field) provides an opportunity where players can see that they’re there supporting them – which is core to the group identity. The opportunity to be included in the television coverage while holding up the banner adds excitement to the experience as it expands the audience through which supporters can display their identity. This excitement is amplified for those who would not normally be given the opportunity to be involved in the banner experience at home games as being a part of the banner experience allows supporters to feel they are, and to
claim access to the inner network of supporters who are involved with an official club activity. By doing so, the supporter identity is reinforced. The banner experience is therefore key to the construction and confirmation of the supporter identity.

**Home versus away experience.** The away game presents a different setting than a home game. Supporter group members expressed that one key difference between home and away games was the roles and responsibilities of the supporter group. At home games, these included welcoming other supporters to the home venue, and assisting the club in other duties. One core member of a supporter group put it this way:

Home games we tend to do a bit more work around the place like getting stuff ready for the footy club, and just generally meeting all the people that come in from Melbourne [supporters of the club who live in Melbourne]. They’re the ones that only come to the home games or the Melbourne games. I guess we spend more time at home games, we get there about 9:30 a.m., and we’d be there till about 8:30 at night. Away games, you get there [to the stadium] just before the gates open, and we’ve only really got two jobs – get the banner ready and a few things that we bring up for the football club like the stretchers and that – probably about half an hours work. So we’ve got more time to ourselves when we go away. At home games we’re pretty busy doing bits and pieces for the club. (SG2, male)

The fact that the supporter group has fewer official roles and responsibilities at away games allows for a more relaxed experience. The only responsibility that the supporter group has at away games revolves around the banner. The reduced responsibilities at away games allow the supporter group members to spend more time interacting within the group than at home games. Group members emphasise that travelling to away games provided time for group members time to catch up and interact with each other on a more personal level. The added time to relax at away games allows supporter group members to build stronger personal relationships among the group.

Also contributing to the experience at away games is the way in which players and club officials interact with the supporter group. One respondent put it this way:

I’ve found the players when you’re at home at a function are very quiet. Last year we went to Adelaide and we went earlier and had a trivia night, they had two players there. One that was there was very quiet earlier in the year, but in Adelaide he was very chatty indeed. Probably because he was out of his home environment. He’s in a different environment where he’s not known…. So when we go interstate you probably find they [the players] let their hair down a little more. We’ve been known to bump into a couple of players after a match at the casino, or just sitting down having some quiet time. So I guess when they get out of their environment they’re more comfortable. (SG2, male)
It would appear that being away from the hometown environment where everybody knows the players provides players with a space that affords them a sense of anonymity off the field. This setting encourages the players to interact more freely with supporter group members, as there are fewer supporters of the team at away games. Additionally, the acknowledgements that players give to supporters of the team (thanking them for their support) are taken more personally. While the thank-you given by the players at the game is communicated to all of the supporters of that particular team in the stadium, the players often make a specific acknowledgement to those who travel. Supporter group members also get a chance to interact with players after the game at official player functions. While these functions are also staged after home games, the fact that there are fewer supporters of the team at the function at away games gives supporters more opportunity to interact with the players. One respondent described the experience this way:

[The best experience was] seeing the players at functions afterwards. Most of them will recognise you and just say that it’s so great that you’ve come up [to the destination]. Usually if they lost, they’ll apologise. We’d say that doesn’t matter, we’re here. Some people get upset if you lose, some people don’t take it as well, but most [of the teams’] supporters have had mostly losing experience and take it pretty well. You still try and give the players encouragement. (SG3, female)

Notice that the supporter group members use this personal time with players to pledge their support and express that they are and will remain loyal supporters of the team regardless of on-field success. In fact, supporter group members use the fact that they travel to away games as a point of differentiation from other supporters of the team at the home destination who do not travel. Differentiation is also made between those who do not continue to follow the team when the on-field success is poor. Having the players acknowledge and praise the actions of the supporter group communicates that the efforts of the supporter group are noted by the team and acknowledged as being integral to the continued success of the team (albeit on-field or off-field). The more personal interaction that is had with players, the more supporter group members feel that they are part of the inner circle of supporters surrounding the team with direct access to the players who they support. For many supporter group members this acknowledgement, accompanied with the fact that there are fewer supporters of the team at away games, acts as motivation to travel to all (or most) away games. The supporter group members who travel to away games feel a sense of exclusivity in the interactions that they have with the players in that they are able to get closer contact with players at away games than at home games.

Group maintenance. Dressed in official team colours, seated in the official away team supporter area, and surrounded by security, supporters of the away team (including the supporter group that travels) are an obvious minority at the away game. Given the circular nature of the stadium in which AFL is played, the group is always surrounded by home team
supporters. Supporter groups are adamant about projecting a positive image of their group to the supporters of the other team, as they are essentially at the game representing their team and club. Given these factors, supporter group members have an increased awareness of actions of other supporter group members. If a group member acts in a manner contrary to the image that the group seeks to uphold, other supporter group members remind that person of the group norms and try to encourage him/her to abide by the norms. While this is also true to some extent at home games, the increased number of supporters of the opposing team amplifies the effect. In particular, the supporter group seeks to differentiate itself from supporters of the opposing team in a positive way. Projecting a positive image through the visible actions of members is one way by which the supporter group does this.

Another factor that has the potential to have a negative impact on the group’s identity is the outcome of the on-field contest. The teams of each of the supporter groups I travelled with lost their game. For the supporter groups that I travelled with that undertook a regular trip (rather than an express trip), the supporter groups used the team loss to bolster its identity rather than perceiving the loss as a negative. In particular, the supporter groups used the team loss to differentiate themselves from other supporters by claiming that they were better supporters. The justification was based on the notion that the supporter group had travelled to follow the team, and would continue to support the team (and continue travelling) in spite of the team being unsuccessful:

Just look at the point that we’re losing. We’re at the bottom of the ladder, we haven’t had much success but there are still people who want to support the team. I think that says a lot. Personally I don’t think that there are too many teams out there that could go through what we go through and still have that passion. (SG3, male)

The supporter group members seek to differentiate their group from other supporters who do not follow the team when the team does not experience on-field success:

I suppose some people get fickle, get very fickle and fed up with it all. The club might promise so much and don’t deliver, and I suppose for some people they can only take so much of it [the team losing games]. (SG2, female)

This highlights that the core purpose of the supporter group is to support the team. Therefore, poor on-field performance is not perceived as a negative but rather as an enhancement to the way in which the group is perceived as being loyal supporters of the team. Given the primary point of identification of the supporter group was to support the team, the reaction to the team losing was not perceived as having negative connotations on the group because the on-field success was not core to the group’s identity.
The supporter groups’ actions during the game further highlighted that the group was clearly using the poor on-field performance of the team to bolster the group’s identity:

During the second and third quarters, the team was performing exceptionally poorly. On top of that, it started raining, storming, and then hailing. I immediately ran for cover when it started raining, as did most people in the stadium – but not my fellow bus companions. They didn’t move. They stayed in their seats in the supporter group area braving the elements. Most of them had an official team poncho, which they put on immediately. I came back when I realised they weren’t going anywhere. The team scored no more than 20 points in the last three quarters, and ended up losing by more than 100 points. The group didn’t seem to care too much. They were feeding off the fact that the team was losing. Even supporters of the opposing team got behind the group (in a rather humorous way) by starting to sing the team song from undercover. Having travelled all this way by bus, sitting in extreme conditions while the team performed so poorly was their way of showing that they would support the team through anything. (SG3, FN)

As evidenced by the above field-note, supporter groups are willing to go to great lengths to show their identity as loyal supporters of the team. This is especially true in an away game setting where supporters of the away team are the minority. The group seeks to distinguish itself positively from supporters of the other team, as well as supporters of the same team who do not continue to follow the team when the team’s on-field performance is poor.

**Summary.** In summary, while home games and away games essentially involve the same sets of actors (i.e., players, officials, and supporters of both teams), the experiences are substantially different. First, the supporter group has fewer roles and responsibilities at away games. The group’s sole responsibility at away games is to erect the banner in the middle of the field. Supporter group members who travel have a greater chance of being involved in the banner experience, as there are fewer supporters of the team at the game. As a result, group members have more time to interact with each other at away games. Second, the size of the group of supporters in relation to supporters of the other team changes the experience in that those who travel to support a team are most often the minority at the game. The fact that the group is the minority is made blatantly visible by having the group seated in a designated area, which is often surrounded by security. Third, the interaction with the players differs. Being at away games provides the players with more off-field anonymity than they experience at home games. This setting provides a more relaxed situation that promotes increased interaction with the supporters. Since there are fewer supporters of the team at away games, acknowledgments given by players are taken on a more personal level, and therefore the supporter identity is validated. Fourth, the on-field performance of the team is used to further enhance the supporter group identity – especially if the team is not successful.
on-field. That is, if the team is not performing well on-field then the supporter group claim to be better supporters of the team as they support the team despite the on-field performance.

### Long-term Travel Group

The following section describes the game experience of the long-term travel group, with particular reference to how shared identity affects experience. As established in previous chapters, the primary point of identification of the long-term travel group is the social group itself. In preparing for the game, the long-term travel group dresses in team-related apparel, and brings with them banners and team-related cheer paraphernalia:

> Before the game everyone donned their [team] gear. There were shirts, scarves, tracksuits, sarongs, neck chains and earrings in the shape of an anchor (the team’s emblem), badges, you name it they had it. They also had blow up anchors and were making sure that all group members knew the anchor protocol – how to hold the anchor given different on-field scenarios…. Some of the apparel and cheer paraphernalia that was used was not official merchandise, but items that the group members had made themselves. (LG1, FN)

It is interesting to note that some of the apparel and paraphernalia that the team uses is not official merchandise, but rather that which the group has designed and customised for its own purposes. For example, the group used a banner which had the team logo on it, and also had “Bus Trekkers” screen-printed around it. This is one way in which the game and team provide a means to display the identity of the particular travel group, rather than just the team.

On arriving at the game, there is a strong emphasis on taking photos of the travel group dressed in their team related apparel in front of the bus. The backdrop of the bus is of paramount importance when taking photos of the group as it is a symbol that represents and legitimises the group as the “Bus Trekkers.”

On entering the stadium, the group is part of a visible minority of away team supporters. There is a cornered off section for supporters of the away team in the stadia, where the group combines with other supporters of the away team, as described in the following field-note:

> During the game, we were seated in a cornered off area behind the goal posts (the traditional supporter group area). We were surrounded by security guards that I was told was an artefact of happenings on previous trips where the opposition’s fans had been abusive towards the group and had thrown things at them. Being surrounded by security guards, in addition to the similar colours and paraphernalia in which the group dressed certainly highlighted the fact that we were the minority at the game. There was a crowd of close to 40,000 – only about 100 were supporters of the away team. However, the group didn’t use the distinction to make any outgroup comparisons. In fact there was really no interaction or banter with any of the
supporters of the other team…. Most of the photos taken in the stadium were of the travel group, rather than of the game or the players. (LG1, FN)

While the group combines with supporters of the same team in the seating area, the group maintains its uniqueness by making sure all group members are seated in a manner where they can all interact with each other. In particular, within the area cornered off for fans of the away team, the group maintains a block of seats in which all members can easily communicate. By doing so, the group is able to continue socialising within the group throughout the game.

Like the supporter group, being the minority at the game makes the experience considerably different from attending home games – a feature which adds to the group experience. Group members expressed that the “atmosphere” at the game is considerably different at the away game given that they are the minority. The difference for the long-term travel group, however is not derived from the presence of (and interaction with) supporters of the other team. Rather, the difference resides in the fact that the travel group itself sits together and revels in the atmosphere, which is generated from the camaraderie and social interaction among travel group members. This is not surprising given the primary point of identification of the group is the social group itself. As the group had its own space at the game in which group members could continue to interact, the group did not seek to interact with anyone outside of the group, nor did they seek particular interest in the game itself. This was further emphasised when respondents were asked about their best experience of the trip. The game itself was acknowledged as one venue in which best experiences were had, however, sport or team-specific references were notable in their absence:

I think the best experience is the game itself. Everybody is doing it [cheering] the whole game instead of waiting for something to happen. It’s just the camaraderie at the games. It’s almost like a power trip because you’re there against 39,000 throats – and it’s just like, yeah, we are here. That’s the buzz for me. At home games you cannot get a response from anyone around you who is a [team] supporter like you have here. (LG1, female)

A close examination of this response suggests that it is not actually the on-field action that is of prime importance, but the feelings of camaraderie among the group members at the game. This highlights the fact that the primary point of identification of the group is with the social group itself, rather than with the team or sport. While the above comment suggests that the group as the minority is constantly competing with supporters of the other team to be heard, this was not evident at the game. The long-term travel group did not pay any attention to the supporters of the opposing team around them, nor did they seek interaction with the players at the game. The group did cheer for the team, and was involved in chanting and singing songs throughout the game, but there was no interaction with supporters of the home team. Instead, the group focused on interacting within the travel group, rather than interacting with players,
supporters of the other team, or even other supporters of the same team that were not part of the travel group. As described in previous chapters, travelling with the group was seen as a rite of passage for group membership. While other individuals had travelled to the game by other means (separate from the bus), they were not totally accepted into the group at the game. This was especially true when they did not conform to group norms:

The area where the group sat to watch the game was an alcohol free area. A family of supporters of the team, who had travelled to the game separately from the group, were sitting with the group. One of the family members carried in a bottle of champagne which exploded when she put it down. The group complained about this as it reflected badly on the whole group…. Members of the group who had travelled by bus also carried alcohol into the area (disguised as other beverages) which was perceived by the group as a point of amusement – rather than a point of disdain. (LG1, FN)

The travel group’s perception and reaction in this instance was not solely based on the individual not adhering to group norms. The fact that the individual had not completed the rite of passage of travelling on the bus contributed to the group’s reaction. The game experience was perceived as an extension of (not distinct from) the travel component of the trip. In particular, the game was just another venue which allowed the group to express and experience the shared identity of the social group.

Acknowledgement from and interaction with the players was not sought. The players make a special effort to thank the supporters after the game by moving to the area of the field closest to where the group is seated and clapping in the direction of all of the supporters of the team. The travel group take note of this and acknowledge that they do not get the same attention from players at home games, but, this was not a large or important part of the experience. Likewise, the actions of the travel group at the official players’ function suggest that the team itself is secondary to the social group:

We went to the Players’ Breakfast…. There were three tables set aside for the Bus Trekkers. The players and the club officials spoke to the audience, and gave a special acknowledgement to the Bus Trekkers…. No one from the travel group interacted with the players. All of the other supporters of the team that were at the breakfast were asking for autographs, and having their photos taken with the players. The travel group were taking photos, but not of the players. Their photos centred around the different tables of Bus Trekkers. Group members said the breakfast was about the travel group and not about the players. (LG1, FN)

Group members clearly had the opportunity to interact with the players of the team they had travelled to support. However, group members chose to socialise within the group rather than to interact with the players. The experience of the long-term travel group is overtly social and based on group membership. The outcome of the game did not have any impact on the group
identity, as the primary point of identification of the group is with the social group. The team lost the game that we travelled to watch, yet the cheerful demeanour of the group did not change. One member suggested that the group was “conditioned to [the team] losing,” as the team did not have a history of on-field success. Group members expressed that the on-field performance of the team was not important. Accordingly, they stressed that despite the team’s losing record, the trip was important to them. One participant put it this way:

It’s a pretty unusual thing…[to] drive 2700 kilometres to watch a footy team play…. I don’t think that people would understand. There’s a mob of people who just travel all that way to see them [the team] lose, and I don’t think there’s anyone who is particularly disappointed with the trip. That sort of thing is hard to explain to someone who is not involved. (LG1, male)

For the long term travel group, camaraderie pervades the whole travel experience, including the game. The trip is planned around the game and, by extension, the team. However, the on-field action itself has little impact on the overall experience of the group.

**Summary.** While attending the game at the destination may be the rationale for the trip for the long-term travel group, the on-field game itself and, by extension, the players do not have central importance. The game provides a setting through which the travel group can continue to celebrate itself. Even though the travel group is able to obtain direct access to the players and increased recognition for giving the team support at the away game, these experiences are seen as secondary to social interaction within the group.

**Temporary Travel Group**

Whereas the supporter group and the long-term travel group enter the stadium as a pre-existing group, those involved in package tours do not. As the temporary travel group is united only by shared experience in a particular packaged tour, it is possible that the game is the sole activity where all participants come together. The game experience for those involved in an organised package trip can differ depending on the specific elements that are included in the package, all of which can affect the experience and the degree to which a group or group structure is formed among trip participants.

The trip organiser can specify to trip participants the type of dress that they are to wear, especially if a specific function is included as part of the game package:

The details of the trip package specified that trip participants were to dress formally for the game, as we would be attending an official club function…. The only visible evidence of the participants being [team] supporters was a scarf that one lady wore, and a tie that one of the men wore. I could not tell that the tie was an official team tie. It was only when I was told that I noticed it. There were a lot of comments such as “I’ve never gotten this dressed up for the footy before,” and “it just doesn’t feel right [like being at the football] without jeans, beanies, and a scarf. Trip participants continually commented that they didn’t feel as though they were at a football game.” (TG2, FN)
The way that trip participants dress for the game substantially impacts their experience at the game. It is evident from the above field-note that dressing in a manner that is not normal dress for attending a football game makes the experience somewhat surreal for those who attend. For this group, the scarf and tie were the only two visible identifiers to link the group to a particular team. The way in which trip participants were dressed then impacted on how others in the stadium viewed and interacted with them, as they were not easily identifiable as fans of a particular team. The actual arrival at the stadium can also affect the experience:

Arriving at and entering the stadium in advance of the opening of the gates limited any interaction that the trip participants could have with any other game attendees. In fact, there were no other game attendees at the stadium when the group arrived. On entering the stadium the group was isolated from the main seating area of the stadium in an enclosed function room and corporate box where they stayed for the duration of the game. Some trip participants commented that the combination of dressing differently from how they would normally go to a game, and not experiencing the atmosphere in which they would normally arrive at the game made them feel more as if they were at a function, than as though they were attending a football game.

Where the group sits in the stadium also affects the game experience. Unlike the supporter group and the long-term travel group who have a designated seating area among other supporters of the same team, the seating area for the temporary travel group is determined by the trip organiser. The trip organiser purchases a block of seats for the group which often includes high-end (expensive) seats with a good view of the whole playing field. In fact, the seating area for the temporary travel group is often isolated from the crowds of other supporters in the stadium. For example, one group was totally isolated from all other game attendees in a function room and corporate box:

When the game started we moved out into a corporate box that had cushioned seats. A number of people commented on the seats as being different from the normal plastic seats that are used in other areas of the stadia. The group was also segregated from everyone else in the stadium. The corporate box was sufficiently distanced from the seating of any other game attendees. It
was virtually impossible to interact with other supporters of the team (who were not in the function), or supporters of the other team. We also left some time after most of the fans exited the stadia as we had more official activities organised for us. The group members moved inside during the breaks in the game. So there was really no distinction between the actual function and the game itself. (TG2, FN)

Another group was seated to the side of the stadium away from other supporters:

Our seats were to the left of the goal posts, and were very close to the field. We had no interaction with the supporter group of the team – who were seated far away from us behind the goals in the traditional supporter group area. The supporter group seemed to be getting right into the game, whereas the travel group did not. There was really no one around the group that we could exchange friendly banter with. For the first three quarters of the game there was barely any reaction from the travel group. They did tend to get more into the game in the last quarter though. (TG1, FN)

Being physically segregated from the rest of the game attendees (when seated and when moving in and out of the stadium) at the game limits the interaction that the group has with supporters of the same team, or supporters of the opposite team. As the group came together as a collection of strangers (apart from the subgroups within the group who knew each other), the isolation of the travel group facilitates interaction among trip participants, and can lead to the formation of a group (as described in chapter four).

The temporary travel group is less animated than the other two types of groups. This is dictated by the seating area and the type of function (if any) which are trip inclusions. Since the group is secluded from other supporters of the team, they do not have to face immediate distinctions between supporters of one team and supporters of the other. What group members wear and who they visibly identify with affects how others interact with them. With minimal visible identifiers to tie them to any particular team, the group does not receive any comments from supporters with whom they come into contact. There is no association. What is of more importance to the temporary travel group is their interaction with individuals (including players and officials) and objects (including stadia) that are the inner core of the sports/team’s social world.

The stadium in which the game is held has a significant impact on the experience, especially when the stadium has iconic stature in the sport culture. Group members consistently spoke of the significance of the stadium, the history, and the atmosphere and experience that the stadia offer. Trip participants placed special emphasis on taking photos at the stadium. (This was also emphasised when group members participated in a stadium tour, as described in previous chapters.) This is particularly true of two stadia: the MCG and Colonial Stadium. The MCG holds significant symbolic and historic meaning within the AFL culture. The MCG stood in 1897 when the competition began, and is considered the “home
of the AFL.” It is essentially the geographical centre of the AFL’s social world (Unruh, 1950). With a capacity of 96,300, the MCG has hosted over 2000 AFL matches, and is the traditional venue for the AFL grand final. The MCG was said to offer a unique atmosphere given the large seating capacity. Unlike the MCG, which has historical significance, the more recently built Colonial Stadium has gained novel significance. With a capacity of 53,555, Colonial Stadium boasts modern facilities such as a retractable roof, corporate viewing areas, seating which is closer to the action, and function rooms. Colonial Stadium was primarily talked about in terms of the unique experience that it offers when the retractable roof is closed. It is the only stadium in which AFL is played that features a retractable roof – hence the novelty factor. The roof can be opened (or closed) within twenty minutes therefore sparing attendees and players from undesirable weather conditions. Additionally, when the roof is closed, the atmosphere is intensified given that the same noise occurs within an enclosed space, thus providing a unique stadium experience. Trip participants were keen to experience the atmosphere with the roof closed, and were hoping that it would rain, just so they could get that experience. Trip participants are essentially collecting experiences within these stadia which have symbolic value to the particular team or sport.

Another key experience that trip participants have at the game is the opportunity to interact with players and officials. Since temporary travel groups are organised through a club-related travel service, trip elements often include opportunities to directly interact with team players and officials. Seeing and interacting with the players has significant meaning for trip participants, as they do not have access to the players and officials at home games. The travel group often get a special acknowledgement from the players and officials:

There was an MC for the day who introduced guest speakers such as the coach of the team, and a couple of ex-players. The MC made special mention of the group that had come down from Brisbane, and also thanked all of the sponsors of the club – the function that we were a part of was mainly for sponsors. The group really appreciated this acknowledgement. (TG2, FN)

Receiving recognition of their travel to the game by those core to the team and club (players and officials), allows group members to feel that it is an authentic “team” trip that they are on. The type of interaction that the group has with players also impacts upon the experience. Where one group attended an official team function which had the players and officials addressing the group as a whole, another group was able to go and visit the players in the dressing room before and after the game:

The men on the trip got to go and visit the players in the dressing room before the game. They came back to the group very excited and were telling us all about their interactions with certain players, and any information they could about injuries to the players that would possibly affect the game…. About five minutes before the game ended [the trip organiser] rounded up the guys in the group so that they could go down into the tunnel and welcome the
players off the field, and also to see the players in the change rooms after the game. When the game finished the team song was playing and everyone was standing up singing and cheering. A lot of the group (those that didn’t get the chance to go down to the players’ change rooms) went over to the railing where they could see the players walking through. They could also see the rest of the group members in the tunnel greeting the players, who were shaking the hands of the players and team officials as they walked in. There were a lot of comments after this saying, “Now that’s certainly worth the trip.” (TG1, FN)

Going “behind the scenes” into the dressing rooms allows group members to see the players as they prepare for the game, and to witness official communications between officials, coaches and the players. Having access to the players in that forum is rare and therefore the experience provided bragging rights for the group members involved. After the game, there is also an official post-match function which the travel group is invited to attend, along with other local supporters of the team. Given that the group sits away from supporters of either team during the game, going to the function presents an opportunity to interact with other supporters outside of the travel group. The key focus of the trip participants at the player function however is to interact with the players:

Walking into the post-match function the group picked the seating based on where they thought the players would be. The interaction with supporters of the same team was spontaneous when entering the function. There was a lot of excitement among the whole room full of supporters – a lot of singing and chanting. The guys came back from the dressing rooms and said that there were no injuries to any of the players, and said that the players would be up shortly…. Five of the players turned up for the function. The trip organiser brought all of the players around to the table individually and introduced each of them to the whole group. One of the group members was adamant that I get my photo taken with each of the players…. Everyone was so excited getting their photos taken with the players, and getting to meet and chat briefly with them. The whole room was a buzz. (TG1, FN)

The function presents another opportunity through which trip participants can interact with the players on a more relaxed level as the game is over. Taking photos with players is an important aspect of documenting the experience, as is requesting autographs. These mementos are treated with special regard and are bragged about when returning home.

The game experience for the temporary travel group is not so much about the game itself, but about interacting with and experiencing elements that are core to the team and the sport (e.g., the stadia, the players, the officials). Since the trip involves opportunities to interact with the core of the team, trip participants are essentially collecting experiences that
have meaning and value within the consumption community. The on-field action is secondary to this interaction.

The group wasn’t getting into the game much. The team weren’t doing very well, and ended up losing. Only one person really reacted to the game outcome, he went back to the hotel to sleep as he wasn’t happy with the game outcome. He was without a doubt the most avid supporter of the team in the group. The rest of us met in the hotel lobby to continue interacting and making the most of the time at the destination. (TG2, FN)

In this instance the group was dressed in formal attire and therefore did not feel that it was an authentic game experience – thus limiting the reaction to the game outcome. This is not surprising as there were many aspects that distracted trip participants from the game. Being seated in a location that is isolated from the large crowds of fans did not allow trip participants to interact with other game attendees. There was no contact with anyone outside of the group for this to occur. Trip participants were also diverted from the outcome of the game as there was limited time at the destination to go and explore.

Summary. The game experience of those who participate in organised package trips is largely influenced by the game specific elements that make up the game experience (e.g., the functions that are attended, the seating area of the group). Being isolated in an area which is separate from the main seating area of the stadium limits any interaction that group members can have with other game attendees. The specific game elements therefore affect who the group is able to interact with (if anyone outside the group). The game experience is more about interacting within the core symbols of the team – with the players, officials, and within a stadium.

Concluding Comments

While travelling to follow the team is the stated rational for the trip for all three groups, the game experience for each is substantially different. For the supporter group and the long-term travel group the experiences are considerably different given the different primary points of identification of each group. Supporter group members have a greater chance of bolstering their supporter identity at away games by being involved in particular activities (e.g., the banner experience) they believe are central to supporting the team. The experience is about showing support for the team. For the long-term travel group, camaraderie within the travel group pervades the whole experience. The group is not concerned with any other game attendees (regardless of which team they support), as the game simply provides a setting through which the group can continue to celebrate a shared identity. The experience is somewhat different for the temporary travel group, as the group is essentially a collective of individuals who are united by shared experience. The game experience for the temporary travel group is about having opportunities to interact with those who are central to the team’s and sport’s social world. While interacting with the players has specific significance for the temporary travel group, supporter group members seek
interaction with players only to display and confirm their identity as supporters of the team. Interaction with the players thus validates the supporter group experience, as the team is essentially who the supporter group have travelled to support. The long-term travel group however does not seek interaction with the players. While group members attend an official player function where they have direct access to the players, the group uses the function as an opportunity to celebrate the shared identity of the travel group instead. These results illustrate that the differing point of identification of each group significantly affect the game experience.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Discussion

This chapter provides an integration and discussion of the results presented in the previous chapters. The discussion presents an overview of how to better understand the motives and experiences of fans who travel to follow sport teams, from which a conceptual model is derived. The model emphasises the importance and utility of understanding multiple foci of identification, the level of group membership, the impact of ingroup and outgroup distinctions, the multiple roles the game plays for each type of group, and the liminoid space in which the sport tourism experience occurs. Theoretical and practical implications for sport and tourism marketers are presented from which future research directions are derived.

Research on sport tourism has generally examined the features that make a particular activity, event, or destination attractive, and have justly identified benefits provided by the convergence of sport and tourism. In order to gain further insight into sport tourism, it is useful to understand the motives and behaviours of those who undertake the sport tourism experience. The results of this study suggest that the motives and experiences of fans who travel to follow professional sport teams can be usefully understood in terms of group behaviour. Specifically, this study identified three types of groups that travel to follow a professional sport team: supporter groups, long-term travel groups, and temporary travel groups. For each of the three types of groups, the sport tourism experience is not simply about the opportunity to watch a team play, nor the opportunity to visit a particular destination. Rather, the game and the destination merely provide a setting that enables an experience based on a shared group identity, or collecting experiences with objects that are core to the social world surrounding a team or sport. In fact, while attending the game was central to the trip, watching the on-field sport contest itself was never a key experience for any of the groups. Similarly, place does not have central importance for the supporter group or the long-term travel group. The destination(s) to which the groups travel are merely an outcome of the scheduling of matches, and other group based considerations. While these factors are also considerations of the temporary travel group, place is important insomuch as it is key to the social world surrounding the team or sport. The experience of those who travel to follow professional sport teams then can be more usefully understood as a group based experience, rather than an “experience of watching sport” or “experience of place (Standeven & DeKnop, 1999). Likewise, the benefits of the convergence of sport and tourism are broader than those initially perceived in the sport tourism literature. These benefits lie not just in the sport or tourism activities themselves, but in the unique social experiences that they engender.
The findings of this study emphasise the importance of the use of a grounded theory methodology, as no one research stream alone (e.g., sport, tourism, group behaviour) fully lends itself to understanding fans who travel to follow sport teams. In particular, the results of this study demonstrate how sport and tourism operate together to provide a unique group based experience.

**Understanding the Sport Tourism Experience: The Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model, which can be seen in Figure 4, explains the sport tourism experience in group related terms. The way in which each of the three types of groups is organized and self-defined forms the basis of how the trip is lived and interpreted. Thus, the sport tourism experience can be best understood through a group level analysis. Each of the three types of travel group has its own unique structure, purpose, and self-definition (discussed in the model as “Group Type”). Throughout the trip group members use these characteristics and definitions as a basis for interaction among group members, and between group members and non-group members. Further, there is a reciprocal relationship between the group type and the composition of trip elements (discussed in the model as “Trip Elements”). The members of existing groups use their knowledge of what is central and important to the group to design a trip that is congruent with the purpose and definition of the group. On the other hand, the trip composition of nascent groups is generally directed by an external source such as a trip organizer or travel company, and therefore trip members choose among potential packages offered, rather than choosing each element individually. Together the group type and trip elements direct how group members define both the group in which they travel and the relevant comparison groups that the travel group uses (discussed in the model as “Ingroup/Outgroup Distinctions”). In other words, these two elements combine to delineate the boundaries of group categorization, and therefore work to define ingroup and outgroup distinctions. These three structural components set the stage for the trip experience itself.

The actual trip experience is central to the development and dynamics of the group and group processes (discussed in the model as “Trip Experience”). When beginning the trip, the primary identity of the particular travel group becomes particularly salient, and is then used throughout the trip to both direct and interpret members’ behaviours. As groups and identity are both fluid constructs, the interactions that occur during the actual sport tourism experience (including travel activities, and the game) act to reemphasize and redefine the group and group boundaries by reiterating what is important to the group. Additionally, neophytes are socialized into the group during the trip through both shared experience and through existing group members telling stories that are central to the group. The socialising and socialisation that occurs is facilitated by the liminoid space in which the trip takes place. Specifically, as the group is distanced in both time and space from everyday life, traditional status barriers are transcended which expedites the processes of socialising and socialisation. Finally, the new experiences had on each trip, combined with the nostalgic recollections of
previous trips, act to further shape the group and how it defines itself. This chapter further describes the conceptual model in theoretical and practical terms.

**Figure 4:** The Conceptual Model

**Structural Components**

Three core structural components: group type, trip elements, and the resultant ingroup/outgroup distinctions work together to affect the trip experience. The following section describes these three structural components.

**Group Type & Trip Elements.** Three distinct types of travel groups emerged. While all groups were essentially traveling to follow a professional sport team, each group came with its own unique formation process, group structure, social identity, motives and socialisation consequences. The different group structures essentially mold the experience that each group had, and therefore resulted in three distinct sport tourism experiences. A reciprocal relationship exists between group type and the trip elements that make up each trip (as can be seen by the bidirectional arrow in figure 4). The members of existing groups formulate their trip based on what is core and important to the group, whereas the elements of the trips of temporary travel groups (which are dictated by a central trip organizer) influence
the extent to which a group is formed. The following section combines a discussion of both group type and trip elements and the reciprocal relationship which exists between them.

*Group purpose and structure.* Understanding the structure of each group is important in gaining a further understanding of the group and provides a set of expectations to predict group behaviours (Brown, 1988; Forsyth, 1999). The structure of each group is influenced by the way and reason behind why the group was formed, and the history of interaction within the group. All groups in this study were in some way related to the club structure (which was a result of how the groups were identified), and therefore the results speak to strategies that professional sport teams can adopt when providing opportunities for fans to travel to follow sport teams. Supporter groups are steeped in the tradition and history of AFL teams and would be representative of those who are at the core of the supporter subculture, as the supporter group is privy to many of the inner workings of the team and club and additionally devote a large amount of their discretionary time and income to following the team (Donnelly, 1981). For the supporter group, the activity of traveling to follow the team is just one of many activities that the group engages in to support the team.

For the other two types of travel groups (temporary travel groups and long term travel groups), the groups form for the sole purpose of traveling to follow the team. The difference between temporary travel groups and long term travel groups is the length of existence of the group – one time versus repeat trips, respectively. Both types of groups are facilitated by some element of the club structure, with a travel agency often forming a part of the membership services that the club offers. When coming together for the first time, both groups often start as a collective of strangers who are united only by shared interest in following the team, and shared experience on the particular trip.

*Mode of travel & activities en route.* For both the supporter group and the long-term travel group the travel mode choice is a key consideration in the planning of the trip. Both groups travel by bus even though travelling by plane would offer a considerable time and cost saving. The travel mode choice of these two groups is contrary to what the Value of Travel Time Savings (VTTS) literature would suggest. The bus is not simply a mode of transport for these groups where the purpose is to make trade offs between time and cost, but rather a setting for a social experience to take place. The bus best allows group members to engage in activities which are central and important to the group. The influence of bus travel on the travel experience is discussed further below under trip experience. For the temporary travel group, the mode of travel is almost exclusively by air. As a result, the group does not usually come into existence until the group is united by the trip organizer at the destination. Consistent with research on organized group packages, the collective of strangers can exhibit group behaviours during the shared experience (e.g., Gorman, 1979; Schimidt, 1979). The level to which the participants on these trips exhibit group behaviours is dependent on both the elements of the trip, and the length of time the participants are together. While the temporary travel groups are often together for too short a time to exhibit any hardened group
structure, the long term travel groups that remain in existence through participating in subsequent trips are more likely to exhibit more apparent group structure.

One of the major differences between the three types of groups is the degree of formality that is evident in each and the subsequent communication patterns that occur in each group. For the temporary travel group, the degree of structure at the beginning of the trip is often limited to the separation of trip organizer and trip participants. Supporter groups, on the other hand, are highly structured with formalized roles and positions (e.g., President, Vice-President, Treasurer, etc) which direct the communication and act as boundaries for group behaviour. While a formal structure forms the pinnacle of the group, an informal structure lies beneath it, where social interaction directs communication. For the long-term travel group, there is no formal structure, however a formalized structure may emerge over time based on interaction and experience. This is congruent with work that suggests that roles emerge through interaction where there is no formal structure (Forsyth, 1999).

Communication Patterns. The way the groups were formed and organized, and the level of formality within each group, and by extension, the group structure affects the communication which occurs within the group. Specifically, the group structure affects the extent to which a groups communication pattern is centralized. Groups with a more formal structure tend to have a more centralized communication pattern than groups with a less formal structure which are more likely to have a decentralized communication pattern (Wheelan, 1994). Continual interaction within the group may seek to centralize the communication pattern of the long-term travel group, while it may decentralize the communication pattern of a supporter group.

Consistent with research which suggests that group size can mediate the amount and quality of group communication (Baron, Kerr, & Miller, 1992; Napier & Gernshenfeld, 1993), it is apparent that the size of the group, and the length of the trip affect the degree to which trip participants interact, and also the level of community within the group as a whole. Communication between group members forms an integral part of the group experience. This is especially true given the extended time that group members spend with each other. Therefore, in providing opportunities for individuals to travel to follow a sport team, marketers should be cognizant of the structure of the group and the communication patterns that may be in existence or those that may emerge. One other key element that affects the communication among group members and the sport tourism experience is how the group is categorised and defined.

Group Definition and Foci of Identification. The perceived sense of oneness with or belongingness to a group which is related to how the particular group is categorised and defined, directs the entire experience for the supporter group and the long-term travel group. The object to which each type of group felt a sense of belongingness to differed, which in part was directed by how each group defined itself. Multiple foci of identification were found to exist, with the primary or most salient focus of identification differing from that tested in
previous studies of sport fanship. The primary or most salient aspect of identification during the sport tourism experience was not the team. For the supporter group and the long-term travel group, group members define themselves in terms of being “supporters,” or by belonging to a particular social group respectively. On the other hand, the temporary travel group members do not necessarily begin the travel experience with a shared point of identification but, through shared experience develop identification with the travel group itself. This is not to suggest that those who travel to follow a team do not identify with the team, but rather demonstrates the spontaneous and fluid nature of identity, and highlights the need to examine multiple foci of identification in various consumption contexts.

Identity is variable, fluid, and largely dependent upon the comparative context (Stott et al, 2001). The myriad of social and personal identities that comprise an individual’s self-concept do not remain salient at all times. In other words, identities are not fixed, but can evolve and become particularly salient when brought about by such things as identity primes or social distinctiveness. For those who travel to follow sport teams in a group, the identity related to the small group becomes particularly salient. Similarly, groups are not stagnant entities – group purpose, structure, organization, and categorization are continuously evolving and being defined and redefined. The fluid nature of small groups was evident in this study describing both the continuous evolution of pre-existing groups (i.e., supporter groups and long term travel groups), and the formation of a group as a consequence of a collective of individuals uniting based on shared experience (i.e., temporary travel group). Similar to studies of hooliganism (Stott et al, 2001), the ongoing process of inter- and intra-group interaction generates and then changes the nature of the groups collective identities. The temporary travel group is the most similar group to that which has been studied in a tourism context in that the group comes together solely for the purpose of the trip. Just as tourism studies have shown that by the end of a packaged tour a collective of individuals can develop into a cohesive group (e.g., Schmidt, 1979; Schuchat, 1983; Quiroga, 1990), the temporary travel groups exhibit similar group processes and behaviours. The addition of a common point of reference (i.e., support for a particular football team, or following a particular sport) provides an instant point of conversation which is made salient by the context – through which a group identity begins to emerge based on shared experience. While such a shared point of reference was not present in previous studies of group tours, the “making of a group” still occurred, but this time was based around a shared interest in a particular team.

Most work examining identification of sport fans presupposes that the team or club is the pivotal object of identification (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Madrigal, 1995; Underwood et al., 2001; Van Leeuwen et al., 2002; Wann et al., 2001). The findings here suggest that identification with the team may not be the most salient aspect of identity when traveling to follow a sport team. This illustrates the utility in understanding the multiple foci of identification that exist among sport fans.
Multiple and interlocking identities exist. However, they need not all be salient all of the time, but rather, different identities become salient in certain instances. While individuals who travel to follow a sport team may identify with a particular team, and the individuals are essentially travelling to follow that team, other factors come into play which influence the identity that is most salient during the sport tourism experience. The findings of this study suggest that identification with a social or supporter group is sufficient to generate team-related consumption. These findings are consistent with research in social psychology which suggests that identity salience is activated and directed by identity primes and social distinctiveness (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002). Identity primes are elements that direct attention to a particular social identity, whereas social distinctiveness refers to the uniqueness of an individual’s social identity in their immediate environment. Identity primes when travelling to follow a team include discussion of the trip at hand, uniting as a group with a particular purpose, the presence of team and group related paraphernalia, and, for the supporter group and the long-term travel group, the bus. The bus contributes to the sense of isolation from the outside world and acts as a physical boundary to delineate how the group is defined. In particular, the bus heightens the salience of the small group identity by encapsulating those who share the same identity in a small space. The bus also acts to heighten the social distinctiveness of the group in that there are not many fans who travel to watch their team play, and even fewer who do so by bus. Further, while at the destination the group is particularly distinctive as they are tourists to the destination as well as supporters of the away team (a minority). The combination of the stimulus cues including group symbols (Cialdini et al., 1976), visual images and words (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001), and the presence of outgroup members and symbols relating to the outgroup (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Rijsman, 1988; Wilder & Shapiro, 1984) led to the identity relating to the travel group to become particularly salient during the trip.

Previous work on sport fans has not considered these smaller groups as objects to which fans identify but has looked at objects that relate to a particular team. Recent work has begun to understand different points of attachment of spectators and fans who attend college football games (e.g., Robinson & Tail, 2005; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005; Trail, Robinson, Dick & Gillentine, 2003). In particular, Trail and colleagues identify two overarching points of attachment: organisational identification, and sport identification. Organisational identification includes identification with the team, the coach, the local community, the university, and the players. Sport identification includes identification with the level of sport (e.g., college sport), and the sport itself (e.g., athletics). The findings of this study suggest that identification with social groups themselves, rather than with any organisation or sport specific referent can encourage team-related consumption. Interestingly, Trail et al. found that the motives escape and social support were overarching motives of both sport fans and sport spectators, which unlike other motives did not relate directly to organisational identification or sport identification. This may well be because fans and spectators identify
with smaller social groups which form part of the overall sport consumption community. In other words, the motives escape and social support may relate directly to a form of identification which was not measured in their study: identification with a social group. The identities relating to the smaller groups become particularly salient at certain times. Identification with smaller social groups can then lead to team-related consumption – as evident in this study. While in certain circumstances identification with the team may be the most salient aspect of a fans identity, these results suggest the need to examine which identities are salient during different consumption activities.

To understand why the findings in this study differ from previous work on sport fandom, it is useful to review how social identity theory and, by extension, identification have been interpreted in the sport context. Social identity theory has previously been used to understand the behaviours of sport spectators and sport fans. However, the theory has been used narrowly with the express purpose of understanding how fans react to the on-field performance of a team. Additionally, the interpretation of the theory in the sport context has viewed the team as the primary point of identification that unites the group. Consequently, the on-field performance of the team (more specifically whether the team wins or loses) has been interpreted as the most relevant dimension of social comparison from which self-esteem consequences are believed to be derived (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976; End, 2001; Hirt et al., 1992). For example, Cialdini et al.’s (1976) theory of BIRGing and CORFing uses the notion that fans are more likely to associate themselves with a winning team, and distance themselves from a losing team in order to maintain positive self-esteem. This was not found to be the case for supporters who travel. Given that most salient point of identification of supporter group members is to the role of supporter, supporter group members are unable to CORF when the team loses as it is central to the supporter group identity that group members continuously show support for the team. CORFing would not be consistent with showing continued support for the team and therefore is not a viable option for supporter group members. Where supporter group members are in a position where they cannot CORF, long-term travel group members have no need to CORF as their identity is based on the social group itself rather than any aspect related to the team. Similarly, neither the supporter group members nor the long term travel group members exhibited the behaviours of unrealistic optimism and voice as described by Jones (2000), as the on-field performance of the team is not of prime importance to these particular groups. This highlights the importance of understanding the multiple and differing foci of identification when interpreting fan reactions to game outcomes, as well as the fluid and dynamic nature of identity salience.

Fisher and Wakefield (1998) also looked at how win/loss impacts on team identification, and suggest that fans identify for different reasons. Specifically, they suggest that fans of successful teams use on-field performance (win/loss) as a dimension of their identification with the team, whereas fans of losing teams do not. Findings in this study suggest that fans do not just identify for different reasons, but identify with different objects.
It is these differing objects of identification which affect how the on-field performance is interpreted. In fact, findings in this study are contrary to the suggestions of Fisher and Wakefield, which posit that fans of losing teams do not use on-field performance as a relevant dimension for group comparison. Specifically, findings here suggest that supporter group members who support losing teams highlight the win/loss dimension to bolster their identity as loyal and committed supporters. This is particularly true when the focus of the identity is to being a member of a supporter group, and by extension, being a supporter, as the identity is derived from the group’s support for the team rather than from the team itself. Interestingly, supporter group members BIRG when their team loses in relation to the achievements of the supporter group itself, not the achievements of the team. Classifying fans of losing teams as “unsuccessful groups” is therefore not an accurate reflection of the group’s identity, as winning is not the group’s task. Rather, the team loss makes the efforts of the supporter group more profound, as the group is supporting the team despite the on-field performance.

While sport fans consume team-related products, team identification is not necessarily the most salient dimension of fan identity under each consumption context. Rather, the results here suggest that fans identify with smaller groups that have a shared interest in a team. Yet, quantitative studies have consistently shown that team identification is related to higher levels of team-related consumption (e.g., Fairley et al., 2005; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). The results here do not suggest that fans do not identify with the team, but rather that the most salient aspect of a fan’s identity is not always with the team when consuming team-related experiences. In the sport tourism experience, identification with the fan group is more salient than identification with the team itself.

It is not surprising that quantitative studies have shown that fans who consume more team-related product are high in team identification. A closer examination of the items that have been used to measure “team identification,” shows that those items have not solely measured whether respondents define themselves in terms of the team, but rather that they feel that they are part of the supporter base or fan base of the team. For example, Fisher and Wakefield (1998) include the items “One of the things that I’d tell others about myself is that I’m a fan of the team,” and “Supporting the team is important to me” in their measure of team identification. Notice these items are about defining oneself as a fan, and as a supporter, rather than a belongingness to a particular team per se. Another explanation for this is that identification with a team may be a bi-product of identifying with a smaller social group. The point of identification with the team is not necessarily that which influences all team-related consumption decisions. The distinction is a fine one, however is an important one as defining oneself as a supporter of a particular team, brings with it different motives and behaviours than being identified primarily with the team. Additionally, the way in which the group defines itself, and the subsequent outgroup distinctions are important as they speak to what is important to the group, and explain how the group derives self esteem. For example, supporter group members do not only seek to distinguish themselves from supporters of the
other team, but use their efforts and experiences to differentiate themselves from other supporters of the same team who are not as loyal and committed. The ways in which consumption related experiences are lived and interpreted also depend on the identity that is most salient during the consumption experience. For example, identification with the team itself may bring with it a vested interest in the on-field performance of the team, whereas for the supporter group, the vested interest is in showing support for the team. The different group distinctions are important to sport marketers as the way that the group defines itself will cause group members to respond differently to marketing efforts.

In combination the group type and trip elements help to direct how group members classify their own group (the ingroup) and the relevant outgroups.

**Ingroup/Outgroup Distinctions.** Groups are not limited to identification with one particular object, but rather multiple and interlocking identities exist. It is important to understand the different and multiple foci of identification, as the object(s) with which groups identify underlie the self-categorisations that individuals make. These categorisations are the basis through which barriers between group and non-group members are founded (Tajfel, 1982). Interaction within and between groups is directed by such categorisations which are used as a basis through which meaning and value are derived from experiences. Identification with a group sets ingroup/outgroup distinctions and ultimately affects intragroup and intergroup interactions within social settings including those that occur at the game. Specifically, the point of identification effects the ways in which individuals define ingroup and outgroup distinctions, and derive objects of social comparison. As the minimal group paradigm suggests, simple knowledge of belonging to a particular group is enough to motivate ingroup favoritism (Brewer, 1979). The ingroup/outgroup categorisations used during the trip are based around the particular identity (or identities) that become particularly salient at the beginning of the trip. The heightened salience of an identity influences perceptions, behaviours, and performance so that they are inline with group norms (Abrams, 1994; Hogg, 1992). Therefore group members interpret and live the travel experience in relation to that particular identity, resulting in a period of prolonged identity salience. While it is possible for different identities to become the most salient or prominent during the trip, the travel groups maintained the same salient identity throughout the trips, thus the ingroup distinctions remained stable.

The games itself provides a setting where ingroup and outgroup distinctions become particularly relevant. Supporters of each team become visibly distinct as they wear team related apparel and display team related paraphernalia, and therefore one would expect the fans of the other team to become a relevant comparison group. This is the case for the supporter group and the temporary travel group, however the long-term travel group does not utilize fans of the other team per se as a relevant comparison group at the game, but rather utilizes *all* non-group members (including other fans of their own team) as a relevant outgroup. Distinctions are not limited to those made between fans and non-fans, or between
fans of a particular team and fans of another team, but also include distinctions between
different fan groups that support the same team. Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel
& Turner, 1986), the groups used comparison groups to maximize positive differentiation.
The ingroup/outgroup distinctions are not necessarily made between groups that the travel
group come into contact with during the trip. For the supporter group members in this study
seek to differentiate themselves from supporters of the team who are not as loyal and
committed as they are. These distinctions are not made between fans of the team who travel
and other fans at the game who do not travel, but rather between fans who continue to follow
the team when the team is losing, and those who do not. This is similar to the findings of
Stott et al (2001) who posit that Scottish supporters differentiated themselves from a social
category that was not always physically present.

In summary, the results clearly indicate that the primary or most salient point of
identification of sport fans can be with a smaller group (i.e., supporter groups, social groups).
The most salient aspect of identity that drives the consumption choice then need not identify
directly with a particular team or sport, but rather with a small group that has a common
interest in the team. In other words, the strongest and most salient identity may not be with
the team itself, but with a smaller group to which the individual belongs. Team-related
consumption may then be an outcome of identification with a small group having a shared
interest in a team.

While parading and celebrating the shared identity of the small group, the use of
objects symbolic of the team connects the small group to a wider consumption community
which is cultivated around the brand – often the team, or sport. This is congruent with the
research on subcultures of consumption and consumption communities (cf., Schouten &
McAlexander; McAlexander et al.2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001) which suggests that
individuals who consume the same brand can develop a sense of community. Similar to the
work of Schouten and McAlexander’s work on the subculture of bikers, smaller subgroups
with their own unique identity exist within the overarching consumption community. For
example, the long-term travel group in this study uses team-related merchandise to display the
group’s shared interest in the team. Objects with shared meaning are used to promote
interaction with others around the particular team (Holt, 1995). Individuals use the shared
social and cultural meaning attached to consumption objects to display and communicate
identities (Kleine & Kernan, 1991; Levy, 1959; Mick, 1986). At the game, the supporter
group combines with other supporters of the same team given that there is often a designated
seating area for supporters of the “away team.” The shared team-related symbols that are
worn and displayed unite the supporter group that travels with other supporters of the team at
the game, and distinguish the combined group from supporters of the opposing team.
However, the supporter group represent the inner most core of the supporter subculture still
maintain their unique identity and status. For the long-term travel group, the shared symbols
of the team are modified to display the particular identity of the travel group (often by
customising the team-related merchandise to display the travel group name). Thus, the modified merchandise acts to both express the identity of the travel group itself, and also to display the connection to the wider consumption community (the team) which they are supporting. Although the long-term travel group does not directly engage with other supporters of the team at the away game, common team-related symbols are still used, and thus the group is still categorised as supporters of the particular team. Even though the travel group customises team-related merchandise so that it has specific meaning to the group itself, non-group members (especially supporters of the opposing team) do not make these differentiations, as they are more likely to apply stereotypes to the outgroup (Wilder & Shapiro, 1991). That is, opposing fans hold generalised views of the outgroup and therefore do not make subtle distinctions regarding different uses of paraphernalia. However, the group specific merchandise still has special meaning to the group members who utilize it.

Consumption communities are thought to be united by a shared identification with a particular brand or product. Most outgroup distinctions relating to supporters of the opposition are based upon stereotype at the team or sport level. However, like the work on consumption communities (e.g., McAlexander et al., 2002) suggests, multiple subgroups exist within the overarching consumption community. The results here suggest that most salient aspect of identification is not necessarily with the brand itself (e.g., the team), but can be directly with a subgroup that consumes the brand (i.e., the actual travel group). The consumer’s relationship with the brand is therefore not direct, but is mediated by identification with subgroups that use the brand as a way of expressing identity. While it could be argued that identification with the subgroup may not exist if it was not for the team, the relationship with the team may not be as strong if the identification with the subgroup did not exist. Work on identification and sense of community has noted that multiple interlocking subcommunities exist within an overarching community (Brodsky & Marx, 2001). Based on the work of Weisenfeld (1996), Brodsky and Marx (2001) distinguish between macrobelonging, belonging to the overall community, and microbelonging, belonging to subcommunities within the community. In the case of sport fans, being a fan of a particular sport or team could be interpreted as the overarching community to which an individual belongs, whereas being a member of a particular supporter or travel group could be a form of microbelonging. The findings of Brodsky and Marx suggest that members of a subcommunity differentiate between, and often feel differently about the macro- and micro-communities. This is evident in this study as membership in subcommunities (or smaller groups) were identified, where in some instances subcommunity belonging was used as a point of differentiation from others who were a part of the macrocommunity. For example, supporter group members sought to differentiate themselves from other supporters of the team who only follow the team when it is performing well on-field. As shown in this study, identification with a subcommunity of supporters of the particular team encouraged
individuals to travel to follow a sport team (a form of team-related consumption). The actual travel experience itself was a key part of the sport tourism experience.

The Trip Experience

The trip experience is essentially made up of various activities such as travel to the destination, and the game itself. However, the activities themselves are important to the trip experience only insomuch as they act as common focal points which help to facilitate group processes. For example, the activities enable prolonged identity salience around groups’ foci of identification, social interaction and group development, socialisation, and nostalgia relating to group experience. The activities occur in liminoid space which further enables the group processes to occur. The following section discusses the group processes which form an integral part of the experience of traveling to an away game with special emphasis on the liminoid space in which the experience occurs.

Sport Tourism in Liminoid Space

Traveling to follow a professional sport team provides a sport tourism experience that separates participants in both time and space from their everyday lives. This temporary separation from everyday life provides a space where individuals momentarily neglect their differences, accept each other as social equals, and come to behave as a unitary group. This was evident in all of the travel groups, and was especially heightened for the groups that traveled by bus as the bus provided a distinct social space for the group to interact. The bus, the mode of travel choice that the supporter groups and long-term travel groups adopt contributes to the sense of insulation from the outside world. Air travel is much more time efficient, more comfortable, and often around the same cost as bus travel. However, these groups purposefully travel by bus because of the social experience that it enables. This is inconsistent with studies on the value of travel time savings (Barff et al., 1982; McGillvray, 1970; Quarmby, 1967) which suggest that individual’s trade off cost to reduce travel time, or travel time to reduce cost highlights the importance of the social experience to the travel groups. While other studies (e.g., Walsh et al., 1990) have suggested that value can be a benefit when there is quality scenery to view, the benefits of travel time for these groups is not in what is outside of the bus, but in the social experience, specifically the liminoid state of communitas that occurs inside the bus. Even though participants hold memories of how uncomfortable or time consuming bus travel was on previous trips, the social experience that it provides is valued enough to outweigh the negative aspects. Bus travel itself is something akin to a ritual for these groups as are the activities that take place on the bus during the trip. The activities are designed specifically to facilitate interaction between trip participants, and to discuss the common theme that unites the group, the team that they are traveling to follow. Further, bus travel itself acts as a “rite de passage” (Van Gennep, 1909) that individuals must endure in order to be accepted as a group member.
Studies of sport participants (Green & Chalip, 1998), sport fans (Fairley, 2003; Giulianotti, 1995), and sport volunteers (Fairley & Kellett, 2005) in the context of tourism have noted similar developments of camaraderie between likeminded participants. In a participant context, Green and Chalip (1998) noted a sense of community among individuals who travel to a sport event also transgress everyday social norms. This abandonment was enabled in part by a strong sense of community among participants, and the opportunity to parade and celebrate a common identity. This temporary transgression of social structure exhibits what Turner (1974) refers to as liminoid sense of communitas, and what Norbeck (1974) refers to as a rite of reversal. This “state of being” is referred to as a rite of reversal as the structures, institutionalized roles and statuses of everyday life are reversed to a state of anti-structure where individuals act as social equals.

Sport and tourism are conducive to such conditions as both provide settings where individuals are able to escape the pressures of everyday life. As sport provides a salient aspect of identity for many it provides an opportunity to escape from the stresses and pressures of everyday life to celebrate a common identity. In describing the nature of tourism, Graburn (1977) refers to individuals leaving their lives to participate in non-ordinary experiences. Similarly, the liminoid sense of communitas plays a pivotal role in the sport tourism experience by enabling a setting where socializing and socialisation are made easier. Within the liminoid space, emphasis is placed on the camaraderie and friendships developed among group members from a diverse array of social backgrounds, who by their own admissions may not have interacted with each other in any other circumstance. Individuals are particularly cognizant of this transgression and are conscious of how their behaviour differs from everyday life, with participants continually noting the diversity within the social groups in which they travel. For many, this is the most important aspect of the sport tourism experience and many repeat participants describe and define the travel group and the sport tourism experience by these aspects.

Group formation and the socialisation of new members into a group are made easier by the liminoid state in which the trip takes place. This is consistent with work on group tours which emphasizes the role of a shared setting for development, proximity of members during the trip, the brief existence of the group, shared circumstances, and shared experience as facilitators of a liminoid state, group formation and socialisation (e.g., Quiroga, 1990). Further, given the structured nature of society, the improbability of sport fan behaviour in a non-tourist setting (Graburn, 1977), and the improbability of tourist behaviour in a non-sport setting provides a setting where individuals can deviate from structured society. The importance of the unique social experience is further emphasized when repeat trip participants use nostalgic recollections of the social experiences from previous trips to justify repeat participation. These recollections are used to define the group, and what is central and important to the group – therefore, the social nature of the group is used in the groups definition for most repeat travel groups.
For the supporter group and the long-term travel group in particular, the experience of travelling to follow a sport team is based around parading and celebrating a shared group identity. The travel experience affords individuals a unique opportunity that promotes the salience of a particular group identity for a prolonged period of time. Given the prolonged identity salience, the trip is not just a means of expressing identity, but is also a means of constructing and confirming identity (cf. Donnelly & Young, 1988). The act of travel itself plays a pivotal role in the experience and the shaping of the group and the group’s identity as travel constitutes the majority of the trip. However, little research attention has been given to the act of travelling itself, as it has been assumed that travel time is a production cost rather than a significant part of the experience (e.g., Truong & Hensch, 1985). The experience on the bus provides a setting from which meaning and value are derived relating to the shared identity of the group. The meaning derived from what would appear to be the same activity (i.e., travel by bus) differs depending on the identity of the group.

While Glyptis (1991) has previously identified social benefits to the host community as an outcome of sport tourism, these findings suggest that social benefits are also afforded to the tourist groups which enter the host community, irrespective of the host community. In fact, sport tourists who travel in a group can enter the host community and have minimal contact and interaction with the host community, and interact with only the travel group. Studies in tourism have noted a similar isolation of group tourists from the host community they visit (e.g., Cohen, 1972; Schmidt, 1979), suggesting that the modern day tourist is encapsulated in a bubble and is not necessarily exposed to the host community or culture which they are visiting. This isolation from the outside world contributes to the liminoid state of communitas that forms an integral part of the sport tourism experience, and places emphasis on how each group defines itself, which ultimately directs the ingroup/outgroup distinctions that arise.

**Prolonged identity salience.** While attending a home game provides the opportunity for individuals to temporarily become immersed in their team related identity, the time that it takes to attend an away game leads to the specific team related identity becoming salient for an extended period of time. For those travelling by bus, where travel time far outweighs time at the destination, travelling to the game plays a key role in creating the social climate that encourages participants to undertake the trip week after week, or year after year. As the supporter group and long-term travel group have pre-existing group identities, the group level identity becomes particularly salient when boarding the bus for the trip (or when preparing for the trip) as the high number of stimuli cues relating to that identity increase awareness of one identity over others and result in the activation of that identity (Wyer & Srull, 1986). Identification with the group becomes particularly salient at the beginning of the trip, and the subsequent trip and experience on the bus is lived and interpreted in relation to that identity. Specifically, the heightened salience of the particular group identity influences the way the group behaves, as well as subsequent interpretations of the experience (cf., Abrams, 1994;
Being encapsulated in a bus away from everyday life with individuals who share a common identity is conducive for interaction to occur among group members, as work on liminoid space would suggest (Turner, 1984).

**Group interaction & development.** The space provides a setting that is concentrated around the specific identity, which is devoid of traditional status barriers and therefore provides a rich social context for interaction and socialisation to occur. Consistent with work on group tours (Gorman, 1979; Schmidt, 1979; Schuchat, 1983), being physically isolated from any external forces provides a context that expedites the formation of a group irrespective of social status. These studies have consisted of individuals who are united by nothing other than shared experience. For those who travel to follow a sport team, the group is united both by shared experience, and a shared interest in the team. In other words, the bus provides a space for an insulated adventure where participants are immersed in a shared identity away from external forces. The added element of a common point of interest provides travel participants with an immediate and relevant communication context through which group members can comfortably interact. This referent includes a system of beliefs, values, and symbols that possess meaning to group members. This shared meaning is then used to direct behavior and interaction and the subsequent interpretation of the trip. While the supporter group and long-term travel group utilize the existing belief and value structures to guide the experience, the temporary travel group primarily utilizes that of wider society and of the wider subculture of fans of the team that the group is traveling to follow. However, during the trip the group tends to develop its own value and belief system which directs further interaction. This is similar to Gorman’s (1979) work on organized package tours where it was found that a group of individuals began to develop and exhibit their own value structure throughout the trip. While nascent groups develop are found to develop a value system, pre-existing groups go through a similar process of indoctrinating newcomers into the group.

**Socialisation.** For existing groups, key interactions among group members on the trip include engaging in rituals and telling stories that are symbolic of the group. In the case of the supporter group and the long term travel group, much of the groups’ rituals take place during the travel component of the trip. This is not surprising given that travel time is often greater than the time spent at the destination. The effects of engaging in rituals are two-fold. First, as rituals and folklore possess specific meaning and value relating to the group identity, shared participation in group ritual serves to highlight and communicate that which is central and important to the group. Marshall (2002) posits that practicing ritual generates belief and belonging around the focus of ritual attention – thus, acting to reinforce and perpetuate what is unique and central to the group. The focus of ritual attention in this case is group level membership. It is not surprising then that enacting rituals during the travel experience reinforces what is central to the group. Second, ritual unites group members by encouraging interaction. This was particularly the case for the long-term travel group whose rituals are
based around the social group itself, enabling camaraderie to pervade the experience. This is consistent with Baumeister and Leary (1995) who suggest that social integration and social unity are outcomes of ritual. The camaraderie and social interaction was further aided by the liminoid state that pervades the experience. The ritual is not only enacted, but is also maintained and preserved through discussion of nostalgic recollections of previous trips. These nostalgic recollections play an integral role in the socializing and socialisation that occurs.

**Nostalgia.** When repeat trip participants come together to take part on the trip, memories of past trips become particularly salient. As nostalgia is inextricably linked to one’s identity (Belk, 1990), these memories reflect what is central and important to the group. As the repeat participants discuss these memories and share stories with each other and also with new participants, newcomers become aware of the activities that are important to the group to point where they are able to relive the trip vicariously. In effect the newcomers were extending their identity by including the past that they had only been told about. Mead (1932) suggests that although individuals have not lived through all of the past periods which they maintain in their memory, they insist on the authenticity of their memories as their own.

Sport and tourism marketers should therefore use folklore and stories related to both the team and fan subgroups as socialisation agents for newcomers entering a group, as well as to remind and reinforce existing group members of what is important and central to the group.

Not only does the telling of stories and folklore from previous trips act to socialize newcomers into the group, but it also acts to reinforce and strengthen the nostalgic recollections in the minds of the group members that are telling the stories to existing group members. While united by shared experience, group members each hold fragments of the overall experience in their minds. When the group reunites and memories from past trips are shared, the fragments coalesce to reinforce and remind of the collective memory of the group. While stories of past trips are told through the whole sport tourism experience, the act of bus travel to and from the destination provides an ideal setting where the group is all together and able to easily converse.

Travel to and from the destination are key in the overall sport tourism experience. The entire experience may not have been as meaningful if the group interaction during travel time did not occur. The findings of this study suggest that travel provides a vital role in creating a social climate that makes sport tourism attractive enough for group members to not only continue the trip from year to year, but to continue further interaction within the overall consumption community. The bonds formed and experienced during the actual travel time encourage further participation in the travel group which forms part of the larger consumption community of sport fans.

While the most salient point of identification (the referent for shared identity) is not necessarily the team itself, the social bonding that occurs with other trip participants during the travel experience is sufficient to generate team-related consumption. This is congruent
with work on consumption communities that suggests that the sense of community developed between users of a product or brand can become a reference point for future purchase choice (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The travel experience itself provides time for group members to develop and reinforce key social relationships, which can strengthen ties to the consumption community. Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan (1993) suggest that the salience of an identity is associated with the social connections that one has involving that identity. Similarly, Callero (1985) suggests that the development of social connections associated with a particular activity leads to higher identity salience related to that particular activity. By providing a space which is conducive to building and reinforcing social connections based around a particular activity, especially when a related identity is salient, travel time can be used to strengthen one’s connection to the overall consumption community surrounding a particular team. Further, the liminoid space which forms a large part of the trip experience is conducive to the formation and development of social bonds. Therefore, one may develop a stronger connection to the subgroup, and also to the wider consumption community of which the travel group is a part.

Previous work on socialisation in the sport context has sought to understand how individuals become involved in sport and sport subcultures (e.g., Coakley, 1995; Donnelly & Young, 1988). Similarly, research in consumer behaviour has sought to identify agents of socialisation that influence the consumption of particular brands or broad product categories (Viswanathan, Childers, & Moore, 2000, Ward, 1974). In these studies, socialisation agents have typically included family (Childers & Rao, 1992), peers and mass media (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). The study represented here demonstrates that there is utility in understanding the socialisation of consumers into smaller social groups, which then form part of the overall consumption community or subculture. The results here highlight the utility of settings which engender a liminoid sense of communitas in order to socialize individuals into, and heighten identification with the wider consumption community – which sport and tourism can both provide.

While travel provides a vital part of the overall trip experience, the game itself is what legitimizes the act of travelling to follow a team. However, the attraction of the game itself is not necessarily in the on-field performance of the team. In fact, while being at the game was considered to be a key experience of the trip, watching the game was not an important feature for all groups. The experience at the game is a key activity which facilitates the group processes and group experience.
The Away Game as Facilitator

The time at the game venue is interpreted and experienced differently by each of the three types of groups. While the game essentially involves the same set of actors (e.g., players, officials, supporters of the home and away team), the ways in which the groups experience and derive meaning from the game differ.

The different roles that each group plays in relation to the game, and the experiences that are garnered can be interpreted using Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach to understanding social life. In particular, Goffman likens social interaction to a series of frontstage and backstage performances that take place on a stage. Through this perspective, individual’s interactions in teams are interpreted as performances, separating performers from the audience. Communication through performances are used as a form of impression management, which are shaped by the settings in which they occur. The setting of the game provides an appropriate framework through which each of the group types perform social roles which display identities. Fine and Speer (1992) suggest that “…the power of performance to create, store, and transmit identity and culture lies in its reflexive nature (p. 8). Thus performance is a means through which identity is symbolically expressed, and also reinforced. Congruent with symbolic interactionists such as George Herbert Mead (1932), identity is only formed when one understands the other actors involved. In other words, identity is constructed through an understanding for the projections of the self onto others.

Game attendance is a central part of the travel experience for both the supporter group and the temporary travel group. For the supporter group the experience is one that involves both backstage and frontstage performances in relation to production of the game. The backstage performances are those in which the group is able to interact with and provide support for players, and club officials. Displaying the banner on the centre of the field essentially provides an opportunity for group members to display their identity as supporters frontstage (centre field) to a wide audience including to players, other supporters, and significant others. These performances allow group members to feel and to communicate to others that they are part of the inner core of supporters of a particular team. The meaning that is attributed to each of these performances, works congruously with the identity that is assumed and salient during the trip. The salient ingroup/outgroup comparisons play a pivotal role in this process. While the temporary travel group is also provided with backstage access to the players, the backstage access is as an observer rather than a participant. That is, the temporary travel group members have access to the players through attendance at official team functions, and through going into the player dressing rooms before and after the game, however, group members merely observe the players and team officials, rather than actively play a role in the production of the game. For the temporary travel group, the meaning and value derived from the game is through collecting experiences with objects (such as the players and officials) that are core to the team or sport.
The game is not any more important in the travel experience of the long-term travel group than any other activity on the trip. Rather, the game is just another setting that provides group members with the opportunity to interact with each other and celebrate the social group. For the long-term travel group it is as if the team (or, perhaps the sport) is merely a vehicle through which friendships are built, and the social group is celebrated. The group is provided with an opportunity to interact with the players at an official player function, but keep separate and distinct from the players at this function. In relation to the game then, the long term travel group plays neither a frontstage role, nor a backstage role, but rather are mere observers of the game.

Attending an away game offers a different experience than attending a home game. Travelling to an away game where there are fewer supporters of the away team provides an increased opportunity to interact with players and key officials. This is especially true when attending official team functions which are included as part of the travel package. These interactions are not readily available at home games, or in the case of the supporter group, are often available but hampered by the number of home team supporters at the game. Consequently, particular meaning and value is derived from these experiences. In fact, these “authentic” experiences with the team, which not many individuals are privy to, allow individuals to feel a deeper value as a supporter. This is consistent with the work of Ashforth and Mael (1989) who suggest that the more distinctive a particular group is, the higher the identification group members have with the group. In this instance, those who interact with the players at the away game experience a situation that is rare and unique, and is therefore assigned a deeper value.

Additionally, the away game provides a setting where the travel group and, by extension, supporters of the visiting team are outnumbered by supporters of the home team. The away team supporters then represent a clear and visible minority at the game. While one would assume that supporters of the home team would be the most salient outgroup that the travel group would come into contact with, this was not the case for all types of travel groups. Instead, the most salient aspect of each group’s identity was used as a basis from which comparison outgroups were derived. The particular identity that was assumed at the beginning of the trip is that which is used as a focus of comparisons for outgroups when at the game. The supporter group was the only type of travel group for which this was the case. Hogg and Abramms (1988) suggest that “different times, places, and circumstances render different self-identifications and salient self-images. The self is thus both enduring and stable, and also responsive to situational or exogenous factors” (p. 25). While all groups attended a football game, the salient identifications differed. The immediate context largely determines the categorisations that become salient (Oakes, 1987; Turner, 1985). While one may assume that the salient identifications may change when in attendance at the game (given the large presence of supporters of the other team), this was not the case. The long-term travel group made distinctions only between travel group members and non-group members.
The temporary travel groups were physically isolated from all non-travel group members, and therefore distinctions between supporters of the home and away team were not salient. Rather, the temporary travel group was isolated and therefore did not come into physical contact with potential comparison groups. The experience then was more about the ingroup and the formation of a group, rather than on outgroup comparisons.

The particular ingroup/outgroup distinction that is most salient in each circumstance directs the experience and the point of identification that is emphasised and reinforced. For the supporter group, the experience at the game, given that supporters of the home team are the most salient outgroup, fosters ingroup cohesion and solidarity with both supporter group members and other supporters of the team. Existing literature on sport fans has suggested that it is threat from a team loss, or from negative information about a team that leads to ingroup favouritism or solidarity (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Branscombe et al., 1993). However, this study demonstrated that the most salient point of identification for the supporter group was being a supporter, so a team loss did not pose a direct threat to the group’s identity. Instead, the increase in group solidarity here could be attributed to their status as a minority. This is consistent with work on minority groups that suggests that being in a minority group poses a threat to group members’ self-esteem which leads to an increase in ingroup solidarity (Brewer, 1979; Simon & Brown, 1987). The away game setting is unique in that being the minority at the game provides a setting which can foster ingroup solidarity in the presence of a very large and visual outgroup.

The differences between the types of travel groups and the distinct experiences that are derived for each group type suggest that the groups can effectively be understood as distinct market segments. Consequently, sport and tourism marketers need to understand and cater for various types of groups.

**Practical Implications**

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study provide some interesting implications for both sport and tourism marketers. In their typology of sport tourists, Standeven and DeKnop (1999) differentiate between connoisseurs, those who have the sport experience as their main reason for their trip, and casual observers, those who have the sport event as a subsidiary activity on the trip. Similarly, Chalip (2001) suggests that it is useful to distinguish between tourism for which sport is the primary component, and tourism during which sport is an incidental component. He suggests that in some cases, sport-related opportunities may enhance the attractiveness of the destination, but may not be the primary motivation for going. The results of this study suggest that sport and tourism components can both be secondary considerations to the social experience. This should be considered when designing packages for groups who travel to follow a team. For supporter groups, trips should be tailored to meet the timing and financial needs of the majority of the group. Official team (and club) updates could be given to the group when they are departing the clubhouse. Further, team updates could be provided to the group throughout the trip by
simply phoning a member of the supporter group who is on the bus, as in many cases there are last minute changes to the team. The club and players should acknowledge the efforts of the supporter group for traveling to support the team – especially after a loss. The majority of the rituals that the supporter groups engage in at the destination involve participating in activities which relate specifically to the team, and showing support for the team. Most supporter groups have a pub at each destination with a connection with the team or sport (e.g., owned by an ex-player, football themed) that they attend ritually. Local businesses could capitalize on the connection with the team by theming their business in relation to the visiting team (Chalip & Leyns, 2002). Supporter groups see supporting businesses as an extension of the group supporting their team.

For long term travel groups, the trip should be designed to cater for open interaction and socializing among trip participants. This should include activities that the whole group can participate in together, both while traveling to and from the destination, and at the destination. While bus travel is not often perceived as timely or comfortable, the advantages of bus travel (such as the social experience which it allows) should be marketed to attract new participants.

Destination and tourism benefits should be marketed to those who are interested in partaking in an organized package tour. Destination was not a factor that was considered by the supporter group when choosing to travel to follow the team, but did factor in the consideration set of the temporary travel group and long term travel group participant. Those participating in organized package tours were more likely to consider the tourism appeal of a destination in deciding when and where to travel, whereas the long term travel group considered destination in as much as the destination (or by extension, the time it would take to travel to the destination) catered to the group’s needs of allowing all (or most) group members to be able to afford both the time and the cost of the trip. For the long term travel group, the act of travel itself formed a major component of the sport tourism experience as the time while traveling to and from the destination was used for camaraderie and social interaction.

For sport marketers, the utility of the findings goes beyond providing travel to away games. The findings provide insight into ways to create and foster stronger links to the consumption community surrounding the team. For tourism marketers the results have implications for destination marketing and product bundling. It is, useful however, for both sport and tourism marketers to understand all of the findings so that they can work together to add value to the sport tourism experience.

Given the assumptions that have been made in the literature which suggest that it is the team itself to which fans identify, it has been commonly claimed that a winning team is a relatively easy team to market (Greenstein & Marcum, 1981). However, whether the team wins or loses is not under the control of the sport marketer. The findings of this study suggest that those who travel to follow sport teams identification with the team is not the most salient identity, and therefore it is not the on-field performance of the team that is of interest. Rather
the most salient aspects of identity that were used were those to smaller social groups that travel. The implications for marketers are twofold. First, sport and tourism marketers should attempt to create and foster multiple foci of identification that encompass identification with team aspects such as the team, player, and club, as well as with smaller social groups which support the team. Second, sport and tourism marketers can provide forums that encourage social interaction to strengthen the identification with these particular subgroups. Pre and post trip opportunities that encourage trip participants to communicate should be provided. These opportunities could be in the form of an online chat group, or face-to-face meetings. Group members should be encouraged to talk about their previous experiences, and exchange photos of past trips – both activities generating memories from past trips. Discussing past trips can evoke nostalgia and solidify what is key and central to the group. Newcomers should also be encouraged to participate in these discussions as they can learn what to expect on the trip, and also learn more about the group and its purpose. Further, marketers should ensure that marketing communications emphasise more than just the team and the game and play to these identities. By taking the focus off the on-field performance of the team and providing a context for interaction to occur, sport and tourism marketers can contribute to the process of community building among team supporters. Building stronger social bonds among those who support the team will ensure a loyal and committed fan base even when the team is not winning.

Managers of professional sport clubs are beginning to consider organising and promoting trips to away games for their members (e.g., West Coast Eagles Travel, Power Travel), and these efforts have been marginally successful. While Gibson et al. (2003) had previously suggested that away fans might be more likely to engage in other tourist behaviors (than home fans), this was not found to be the case for all groups. If only visiting once, or for the first time, the desire to see the tourist attractions, especially those related to the sport subculture, might be heightened.

The results of this study suggest that thought should be put into the packages that are offered. In particular packages should include elements which foster a deeper connection to the consumption community. Sport marketers need to acknowledge the impact of fans that travel to follow a team, not just in terms of increased attendance at games, but in terms of the deeper social connection that supporters may experience from prolonged exposure to symbols of the team. The activity of travelling to follow a team in a group is one setting which sport and tourism marketers can provide which is conducive for interaction and bonding among a subgroup of team supporters. Individuals in pre-existing groups assume a particular identity relating to the travel group during the whole travel experience, and the social experience is interpreted in the context of that identity. Even though the point of identification of the travel group is not related to the team itself, the social interaction and bonding fosters a stronger connection to the overall consumption community. This is true for both existing group members and newcomers. The benefits of socialising among experienced group members and
newcomers are symbiotic. Specifically, as experienced trip members tell stories of past experience and what is central to the group, to each other and to newcomers during the trip, this not only helps newcomers to learn what is important to the group but also helps to reinforce the norms and values that are key to the group in the minds of experienced participants. This emphasises the utility of encouraging newcomers to travel with experienced trip participants in existing travel groups. The findings here reinforce and further the work of Chalip and McGuirty (2005) which suggests the value of packaging for destination and event marketers. Using cluster analysis, Chalip and McGuirty focused on attraction, activity and subculture, such that the elements in the packages suggested were developed and incorporated relative to visiting attractions, doing favoured activities, and participating in subcultural celebrations or learning. Although the celebration and learning aspects of subculture are noted by Chalip and McGuirty, the more fundamental notion of using the destination to enhance the quality of group based experiences is not considered. Future work should further examine the design of packages that is grounded in experience enhancement.

The benefits of social interaction are not limited to what occurs at the game, but can also include interaction during travel to the destination, and, by extension the game. The results suggest considerable utility in the use of a bus as the mode of travel that best promotes this interaction by isolating the group for an extended travel period. The bus is not widely thought to be an appealing mode of travel as it is both time consuming and can become uncomfortable over a length of time. However, sport and tourism marketers should promote the benefits of friendship and camaraderie that are experienced during bus travel and the opportunity to see sites en route to portray bus travel as enjoyable. Promotions for bus travel could be framed as opportunities to meet with other likeminded supporters of the team and discuss current issues that the team is facing. Newcomers should be encouraged to interact with existing group members in order to provide opportunities to promote social connections that encourage continual trip participation.

Those who participate in organised package tours do not have an immediate connection with other trip participants, nor do they have a shared identity from which norms and values are derived. The shared experience at the destination allows bonds to occur among participants. The experience that is sought by individuals who participate in an organised package tour include the opportunity to engage in experiences at the game that are not generally available to them at home games. Opportunities to interact with the players, and visit stadia that have symbolic importance for the team or sport were considered key, suggesting that sport marketers and managers can promote these types of opportunities to encourage individuals to travel to away games. Participants on these trips derive value from what they consider collecting “authentic” experiences with the team such as interacting with the players at official players functions. Thus, “authenticity” should be key in marketing
organized package tours highlighting that participants are able to interact with those who are central to the team/club and that they are getting a chance to go “behind the scenes”.

The role of the trip organizer in facilitating communication among group members should also be highlighted, as the organizer can play a great role in the formation of a group, and in influencing open communication among group members. For example, particular activities are more likely to foster open communication and make trip members feel part of the ingroup by allowing them to feel as though they are privy to key information that non-group members are not. The feelings of camaraderie and group belonging can be particularly affected by the trip organizer on organized package tours, as they act as the conduit influencing communication and interaction among those who are unfamiliar with one another – thus opening new channels of communication. The trip organizer should be educated on the power and potential that they have to shape the experience of each trip participant, the dynamics of the group. Opportunities for post-trip communication should also be provided for trip participants, so that they can share and discuss their experiences with other trip participants. The trip organizer can encourage the exchange of contact details for this to occur.

Many away game packages that are offered through the club (or related travel service) include seating at the game that offers a good view of the game such as in corporate boxes, but segregates the travel group from other game attendees. Seating the travel group away from other game attendees isolates the group from the atmosphere, and limits their interaction with supporters of both the home and away team. Additionally, in some cases the trip organiser imposes a formal dress code on trip participants to allow them to attend an official team function. This can eliminate the visible association with the team that individuals would normally display when attending a game. By doing so, trip participants do not feel as though they are attending a football match. In a sense, these activities reduce the “authentic” feeling of being at a football match. Sport marketers should be mindful of allowing trip participants to enjoy and experience that atmosphere of the game while also providing an authentic experience interacting with that which is core to the team. It may be beneficial to allow trip participants to sit among other game attendees so as to experience being a minority at the game, and enjoy the associated atmosphere that is unique to being at an away game (keeping in mind obvious safety concerns).

Sport marketers should consider offering group specific merchandise for the group in general, or for each trip that is offered. Providing group specific merchandise such as a t-shirt would allow group members to parade the specific identity of the travel group itself (subgroup). The benefits of the travel group specific merchandise would be twofold. First, the merchandise would be a visible marker of the travel group and a reminder to the individual of the travel experience, which could reinforce the individuals attachment to the subgroup of individuals who travel to follow the team. Second, displaying the merchandise
could generate discussion among other travelers and non-travelers and thus promote the existence of the opportunity to travel to follow the team.

In designing packages for those who travel to away games, sport marketers clearly need to understand that different types of travel groups exist and recognise the value in each market segment. While systematic data are not available about the spending patterns of the groups that travel, it would seem that those who book an organised package through a club travel service (e.g., temporary travel group) are typically offered high-end packages. However, the benefits of sport fan tourism should not just be considered in financial terms. While the financial spend for one particular trip may be substantially higher in comparison to the trip of other travel groups, it would appear that those who engage in these trips do not have the same in-depth experience as those who travel in other groups (e.g., supporter groups). While the spend by those who participate in organised packages is higher than those travelling on supporter group trips, the overall spend across a season could be similar, as members of supporter groups generally travel to multiple games per season. Sport marketers should duly note the added exposure to the overall consumption community experienced by those who travel more frequently.

The structure of the sporting competition dictates the times and destinations to which individuals can travel to follow a sport team thus, providing an indication to tourism marketers as to when and where a particular supporter base may travel. While visiting another destination is essentially part of the travel experience, the importance placed on one destination over another and on the time spent at the destination differs for each type of group. Those who participate in the temporary travel group are most likely to seek out and visit widely promoted tourist attractions at a destination. These tourists have limited time at the destination, and do not visit the destination frequently. Similar to the game experience that these individuals seek, they seek to collect experiences by visiting that which is stereotypical of the destination. Tourism marketers should promote opportunities to see as much as possible (with special emphasis on that which is iconographic) in a limited time.

The long-term travel group has no preference for destination or for the types of activities in which they engage at the destination. The only consideration for this group is that the whole group participate in the activity together. Like the experience at the game, the destination simply provides a setting that allows the group to celebrate the camaraderie of the group. The supporter group travels to most of the team’s away games. However, supporter group members represent what would typically be considered a low-yield tourism market. Based on the sport or team fixture, tourism marketers can predict when and where this low-yield tourism market travel. Tourism marketers can become aware of the routes that these groups will take to the destination, predict stops that the group will make along the way, and activities that the group will engage in at the destination. This is especially true as many of the stops that the groups engage in en route, as well as the activities at the destination are part of the trip ritual. In the cases where accommodation is required on a trip, there is consistent
use of the same accommodation venue. While this market may be typically low-yield, knowing the movements of this particular market, especially given the regularity of travel may be a profitable and easy market to tap.

Limitations and Future Research

The data collected for this study were collected during one particular season of the AFL in Australia. Further research should be conducted to test the generalizability of these findings across seasons, leagues, sports, and countries.

The groups that were studied here were all related in some way to the sport clubs. In addition to these club related services, there are also travel agencies that are unaffiliated with the actual clubs (or league) that offer similar packages. For example, there are an increasing number of sport travel agencies (predominately on the internet) that offer packages to international and national sporting tournaments and events and to a lesser extent general season play. Research should explore the different alternatives that are available to those who are seeking to travel to follow a sport or attend a sport event, and the reasons for choosing one over the other. This research should examine and compare both national and international travel. Interestingly, on other continents, individuals could travel internationally to follow their team by travelling a lesser distance than what those in this study travelled. Therefore, studies should examine both international and cross continental travel in order to follow a sport team or attend a sport event.

Findings here suggested the utility of understanding the multiple foci of identification using qualitative methods. Through examining identification using qualitative methods it is possible to garner dimensions that fans may identify with without presupposing points of identification which may be salient, but not the most important. Future research should explore the different foci of identification that exist within the overall consumption community of sport fans. This research should investigate how multiple and interlocking points of identification can best be fostered to ensure loyalty to the consumption community in different consumption contexts. Future work should explore the economic value of sport fan travel to the sport economy, and also on the economy of destinations that host regular season competition.
## Appendix A. Summary of Cases Selected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Name</th>
<th>Travel From</th>
<th>Travel To</th>
<th>Mode of Transport</th>
<th>Season Round</th>
<th>Opposition</th>
<th>Stadium</th>
<th>Organised By</th>
<th>Year Team entered</th>
<th>Approx Distance (km)*</th>
<th>Final ranking 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Port Adelaide Power</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Essendon Bombers</td>
<td>Colonial Stadium</td>
<td>Port Power Travel</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>726.97</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast Eagles</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Plane</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>St Kilda Saints</td>
<td>Colonial Stadium</td>
<td>West Coast Eagles Travel</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>3422.13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Lions</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Plane</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Western Bulldogs</td>
<td>Colonial Stadium</td>
<td>Brisbane Lions Member Services</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1680.14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fremantle Dockers</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Port Adelaide Power</td>
<td>Football Park</td>
<td>Fremantle Dockers</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2606.21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong Cats</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Port Adelaide Power</td>
<td>Football Park</td>
<td>Geelong Cats</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>726.97</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kilda Saints</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sydney Swans</td>
<td>Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG)</td>
<td>St Kilda Cheerquad</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>802.61</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>

* Source: www.araq.com.au
### Appendix B: Summary of the Major Categories & Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Type</th>
<th>Trip Elements</th>
<th>Socialization Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporter Groups</td>
<td>Overall price &amp; packages</td>
<td>Repeat trip participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term travel</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Pre-existing subgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
<td>Mode of transport</td>
<td>Newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary travel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals vs groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
<td>Alternative travel options</td>
<td>How introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patterns</td>
<td>Mediated communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group characteristics</td>
<td>Sharing arrangements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of group</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with the club</td>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group organizer (appointed vs emergent)</td>
<td>Game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group composition</td>
<td>Price of game admittance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing group members</td>
<td>Choice of game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Activities &amp; Rituals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How found-out about trip</td>
<td>Football related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group history</td>
<td>Non-football related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of existence</td>
<td>Steps on trips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of previous trips</td>
<td>At destination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer from previous trips</td>
<td>Tourist locations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing ritual</td>
<td>Tourist knowledge of group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing follow-ons</td>
<td>Repeat activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group description</td>
<td>Official Functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of group</td>
<td>Pre-game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-categorization &amp; description</td>
<td>Post-game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members describing the group</td>
<td>Attendance at functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-members describing the group</td>
<td>Players (past &amp; present)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for going</td>
<td>Coaches &amp; Officials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most salient aspect of identity</td>
<td>Acknowledgement of the group at function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social group (Supporter group)</td>
<td>Outliers entering the groups space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary group (Emergent)</td>
<td>Changing life around the trips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social group (Supporter group)</td>
<td>Contending against the masses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary group (Emergent)</td>
<td>Prominent minority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security around the group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seating section in stadiums</td>
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### Appendix B: Summary of the Major Categories & Codes (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Game Experience</th>
<th>Responding to Game Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The game transformation</td>
<td>Influence of most salient point of identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for the game</td>
<td>The team owes us mentality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressing in game-time apparel</td>
<td>Wanting to go home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official merchandise</td>
<td>Leaving someone at the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-made group specific clothes</td>
<td>Limited change in group demeanor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing the team song</td>
<td>Limited focus on the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting psyched up for the game</td>
<td>Expectation of game outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-game activities</strong></td>
<td>Recent team performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriving at the game</td>
<td>Win/loss care factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Banner experience</td>
<td>After game events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core group members</td>
<td>Post match activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core supporters of the team</td>
<td>Post match functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much sort after activity</td>
<td>Official team functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being close to the players</td>
<td>Traveling home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smelling the liniment</td>
<td>Seeing the players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the update on the game</td>
<td>Interactions with players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL Game record</td>
<td>Entering the players domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence with club officials</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio headsets</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Seating</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional supporter group seating</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Closeness to the action</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasised minority status</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Surrounded by opposition fans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better viewing seating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More distant from the game</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Football garb vs formal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dictated by function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps to defines in-group and outgroup</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cheer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheer Paraphernalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accepted behaviour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol consumption (or lack thereof)</td>
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